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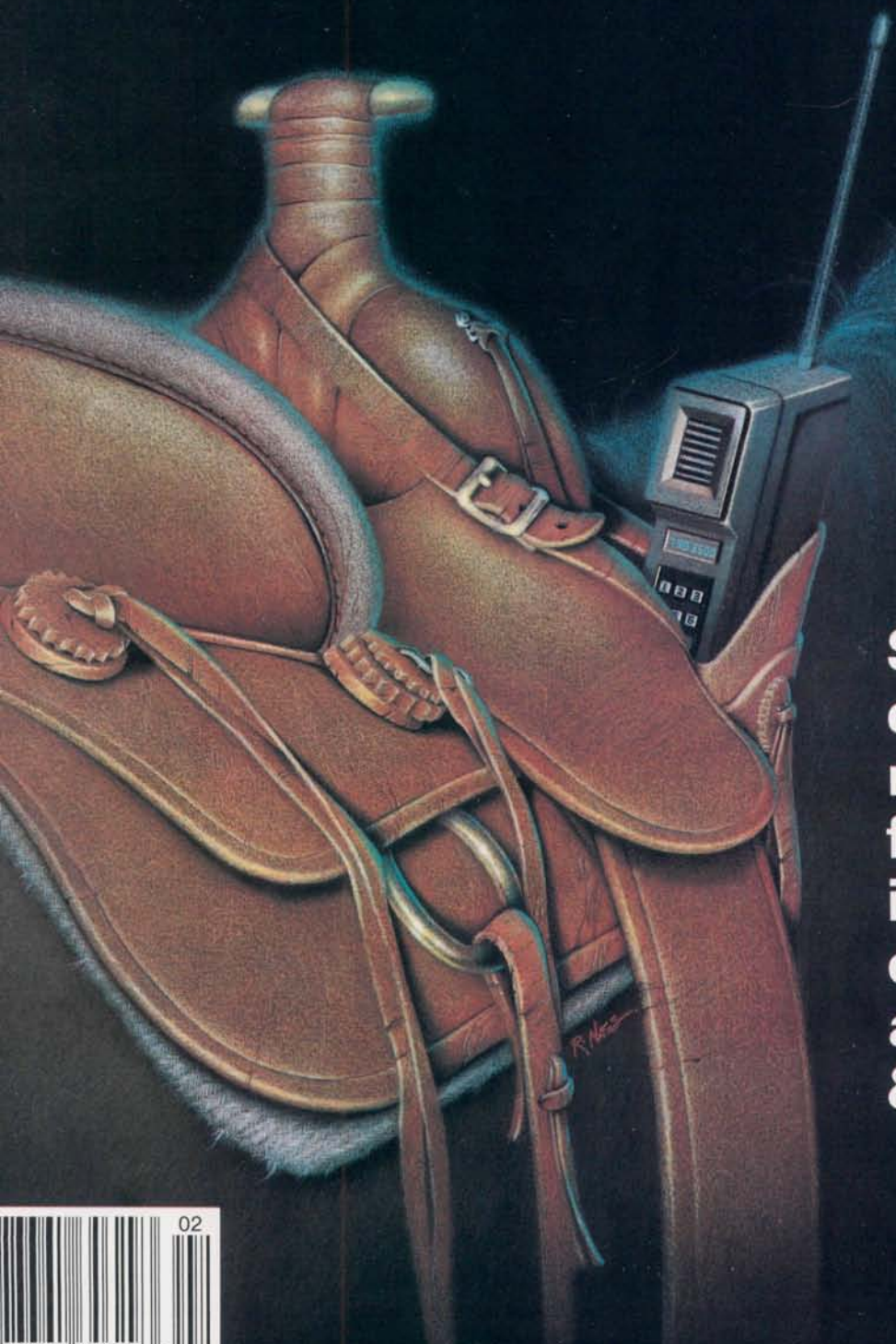
Chronicles

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

THE AMERICAN WEST



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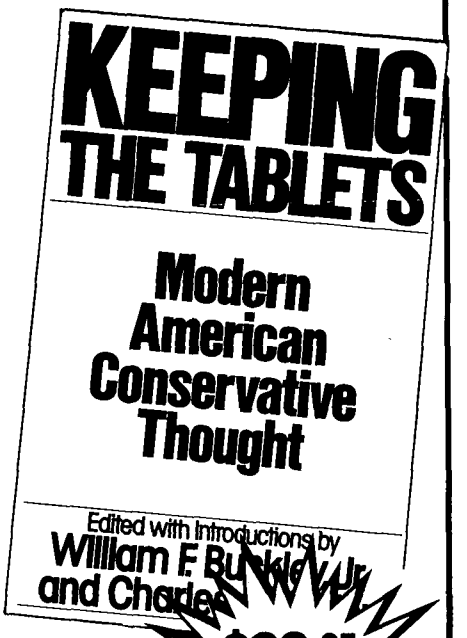

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Vol. 13, No. 2 February 1989

On 'Letter From the Heartland'

I was horrified to see a reference to "Lyndon LaRouche, the Libertarian on the Democratic ticket" in the otherwise superb November issue. As Madelaine Murray O'Hair, the Roman Catholic, once said, "The Devil you say!"

Perhaps the only thing that a libertarian and a LaRouchite could agree on would be that LaRouche is not a libertarian. Libertarians have very little use for a demagogue whose preferred instrument of policy is the concentration camp. Please retract this embarrassment, or I'll be forced to add *Chronicles* to the list of those implicated in the international conspiracy.

—*Dave Burns*
Austin, Texas

Mr. Burns and the other readers who called us on this point are quite right, and we most certainly do regret the error.

—*The Editors*

On 'Letter From the Heartland'

Being the woman Jane Greer described in her entertaining caricature called "The Candidate" (November 1988), I remarked the haughtiness of her perch.

Although I have never met Mrs. Greer, I am not sorry that she feels superior to me. She also feels superior to the world's greatest head of state, President Ronald Reagan, and that puts me in rather high-class company.

Still, when she crooks her little finger and uses "one" as a pronoun, saying of me, "One cringes to think of her at dinner with heads of state," I must tell her that I already have been and that I never act boorish at elegant dinners.

I'll probably never be seated between Khomeini and Ortega, but if that were to happen, I think I could handle it. I'd be as couth as George and Barbara and probably more so than Michael and Kitty. Certainly I would not be as gauche as Hamilton Jordan, who told an Egyptian woman dignitary at a White House function that her necklace rested nicely between the pyramids.

Mrs. Greer's putdown of my social graces bothers me less than her enormous ignorance of politics. I love her *Plains Poetry Journal*, but she's out of her depth in politics.

Her desultory interest in the mechanics of politics led her to saddle me with an egregious lie. She matched a true anecdote to the wrong Republican Committee and the wrong political race, creating a scenario of Republicans advising me to run against a Republican senator. I want to make it clear that the "kook" who created that fabrication was Mrs. Greer, not I.

—*Mary Jane Rachner*
St. Paul, MN

On 'Hard Living on Easy Street'

Associate Professor Dan McMurry claims (August 1988) that there are no homeless in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. I urge him to take a better look. I concede that there is little problem with homeless people actually sleeping on the street in Murfreesboro, though there have been instances sighted. However, there is a high number of people who become homeless in Murfreesboro due to evictions or being thrown out by a friend or relative. In the past two months, I have received 15 phone calls from social service workers, Legal Services, and homeless individuals themselves. All of these callers were from Murfreesboro, and all were looking for help for a homeless person or family. In addition to these cases, there are surely more that go uncounted.

McMurry also states that the reason that there are no homeless in Murfreesboro is because services for them do not exist there. His argument is typical: create or develop services for the homeless, and you'll get a homeless problem. Here, I must borrow a wonderful response from a Catholic priest in Nashville, who has been extremely active in serving that city's homeless population:

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no one travels to a city or town because of the wonderful homeless services they've heard about there. People are attracted to a certain area because they hear of jobs, or because they like that area of the country, or because a friend or relative lives there and likes it—*not* because of the extensive network of social services available there for homeless people.

Developing services for the homeless will not create a new problem. At long last, it will start to serve a local problem locally, instead of shifting the burden to urban areas like Nashville.

A group of committed individuals and churches will begin in November a local interfaith effort to provide overnight shelter and meals to people who become homeless in the Murfreesboro area. This is an example of what needs to happen in other nonurban areas. We cannot depend on funds from sources such as the government. Local citizens must take the responsibility for other members of their own communities who are less fortunate, rather than passing it on to the large cities. It appears that Dan McMurry does not agree. I'm thankful that there are folks who do.

—Suzie Tolmie
Homeless Project Coordinator
The Mid-Cumberland Community Action Agency
Murfreesboro, TN

Prof. McMurry Replies:

Ms. Tolmie is absolutely right. We cannot depend on "funds from sources such as the government." If we do, this is what we get: a push to call all sorts of people with a wide variety of needs "homeless," when, in fact, they aren't. This push comes because "funds from sources such as the government" are now used to pay Ms. Tolmie to find the homeless where there aren't any.

Murfreesboro established a small mission, stocked an Emergency Food Bank, and established a Clothes Closet for the needy long before Ms. Tolmie was brought in as an advocate for the "homeless" and paid with "government funds." Naturally, there are needy people here (aren't they everywhere?) but there *were* no street people and no homeless—using a realistic and meaningful definition of homeless. The occasional transient was fed—and clothed, if need be—put up for a night in the mission, and sent on his way. From time to time, a wandering family got a gas fillup and a restaurant meal here, and moved on.

Now, Ms. Tolmie, in her official position as "definer and locator of homeless persons," has talked local residents into opening up sleeping quarters in church basements and parish halls for poor people who are currently "hanging on" as best they can. Housing is not their current major problem. Certainly these people need something more than a cot in St. Rose or a snack in St. Mark's and a trip back to the local jail—the pick-up and drop-off point.

In his insightful article, "Helping and Hating the Homeless," Peter Marin divides the homeless into two groups not so much by what they have or do not have, nor by what caused them to become homeless, but whether they are seeking to survive outside the system, or struggling to get back in. The natural drive for most of America's poor is to "hold on," and if they slip, to get back up. "Bouncing back" has been as much a part of America's poor as beans and biscuits. And now there is a fine-mesh safety net, giving those who slip an additional bounce. But a community's social support system has traditionally acted more like a trampoline than a safety net. They slip and they bounce back, slip and bounce back. It's not perfect, but it works *if it's allowed to*.

The other group that Marin singles out—those seeking to survive outside the system—stagger to the edge of the safety net and jump over. When they are gathered up in the net, they search until they find another way out. The one group of "homeless" bounces back (if they are allowed to), the other group always wiggles free.

Unfortunately, Ms. Tolmie, and most other advocates, treat both groups exactly alike—as Rev. Carl Resner, director of the Nashville Union Rescue Mission and author of *Crisis in the Streets*, puts it, "they throw blankets and sandwiches at them," and in Tolmie's case, cots as well. That approach is helpful for the escapists; it is deadly for the seekers. What Charles Murray says in *In Pursuit of Happiness and Good Government* about solving the teacher problem applies equally well to the problem of the homeless: "[T]he task in solving the . . . problem is not to engineer solutions but to strip away impediments to behaviors that would normally occur." What this means for our communities is that we should begin *aiding* our needy citizens by helping them to solve their problems, not to further separate them from that possibility. Whether it's a safety net or a trampoline—if you catch 'em they won't bounce.

On 'Yankee Slavers'

Re Clyde Wilson's piece (October 1988), I would suppose most Americans who supported the Confederacy would have seen civil war as being a defense of their way of life, which included slavery, and/or their view of the Constitution. Even if the Republican Party had had views on slavery and its extension to which no Southerner could object, there were many reasons for at least some Southerners viewing it as a revolutionary party, and who can say for certain whether even under this scenario a war for independence might not have seemed the best choice for at least some Southerners?

—G. Hendry
Toronto, Canada

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THE 1988 NATIONAL BOOK Awards were a triumph for the literary establishment, especially for Random House and its editorial director, Jason Epstein. Readers of the January *Chronicles* may have thought we went too far in calling the New York publishing world a cartel. This past year's awards ceremony (November 29) provided the clinching argument. The major presses — Viking, Houghton Mifflin, and Random House (with its Alfred Knopf subsidiary) — dominated the nominations. To add to the general rejoicing, Random House claimed both awards: Pete Dexter's novel, *Paris Trout*, and Neil Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie*. Both authors even had the same editor, Robert Loomis.

Most of the nominations were entirely predictable. Robert Towers, in *The New York Review of Books* (founded, of course, by Jason Epstein of Random House) praised Don DeLillo's paranoid fantasy of the Kennedy assassination "for its vision of an outlaw element in American life devoted to the well-oiled mechanism of sudden death" — and he's not referring to the Mafia. In the same publication, Robert Adams described Brenda Maddox's *Nora* (a plodding and whining life of Mrs. James Joyce) as a "remarkable success" even if it was "flatly written." In fact, NYRB gave major reviews to half the nominees — the rest are too recent. Of the two winners, Dexter's novel is about — what else — the murder of a black girl in — where else — rural Georgia. The "lie" in Sheehan's title is, of course, every defense of our presence in Vietnam. Other great books nominated include Marxist historian Eric Foner's malevolent and dishonest *Reconstruction*, and Peter Gay's *Freud*. The predictability may have had something to do with last year's upset, when Larry Heinemann won out over the favored Toni Morrison. The panel of judges was expanded and, as the chairman of the fiction panel (who is also the president of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation) explained to *New York Times* writer Edwin McDowell, "They all liked working with one another," and added that they were all respectful of each other's opinions. We can only imagine.

Most of the nominees came to read from their work, although two of the more deserving (J.F. Powers and Anne Tyler) wisely stayed away. It was an altogether gala evening. Helen Hayes and Swoosie Kurtz gave dramatic readings, and the literary lights of the age were all in attendance: Arthur Schlesinger, Lauren Bacall, and Shirley MacLaine. (Even the award plaques were designed by Louise Nevelson.) The high point of the evening, however, was the awarding of the first National Book Awards Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters to — who else — Jason Epstein. Mr. Epstein was lauded for his "extraordinary and permanent impact" on the nation's literature. Sounds like an incurable disease. In his memoirs, Random House president Bennet Cerf summed up his impression of the editorial director he had hired: "Jason is part of the literary establishment. . . .He lords it around, but everybody loves him." With good reason. (TF)

PERFUME-SOAKED ADS in upscale magazines — for Eternity or Beautiful or Poison — are nothing new. But now *Sassy* is promoting itself by promoting the smell of itself. You remember *Sassy*; it's Jerry Falwell's least-favorite teenage girls' magazine. (Though if Rev. Falwell thinks *Sassy* is the only "frank" magazine for girls, he hasn't been reading, say, *Mademoiselle* lately, which has published at least one article that could have run in *Playgirl*.) According to editor Jane Pratt, Sassy the perfume will smell "sort of floral but with citrus overtones." Ylang-ylang and I dunno; kiwi, maybe?

There's no doubt that we are seeing the future and it is Sassy. Surely to follow is *Glamour*'s Glamourous and *Elle*'s Ellegant. The execs at *New Woman* will have to get creative.

Magazines were, once, ages past, for reading. Then we moved into picture-books like *Life*, then to *de facto* catalogs like the October Fall Collections issue of *Vogue*. Now it seems they are becoming rectangular $1.95 air fresheners. It's enough to make you positively hunger for a perfect-bound academic review with tiny black type, no illustrations, and long sentences that begin, "Ergo."

THE UNITED NATIONS has been back in the news. Despite our recent criticism (December 1988), President Reagan used the last few months of his administration not only to begin paying the back dues owed by the US, but worse — traveled all the way to Chicago to sign the enabling legislation for the Genocide Convention. "I am delighted to fulfill a promise made by Harry Truman [that great Republican President] to all the peoples of the world, and especially the Jewish people," declared the President, and added that he remembered "[w]hat the holocaust meant to me as I watched the films of the death camps . . ."

Whoever is writing the President's speeches should stay away from film metaphors. The truth is, the Genocide Convention is not going to help the Jewish people at all. Are Mr. Reagan's advisors completely unaware of the repeated attempt to identify Zionism with racism and to portray the Palestinians as the victims of Israel's genocidal policies?

The real effect of the Genocide Convention is to transfer a bit of US sovereignty to the very body that is most likely to make war on the State of Israel — the United Nations. The convention not only contains a provision for turning over genocidal crimes to an international tribunal, but — just as bad — includes in its definition of genocide any acts "causing serious mental harm to members of the group."

Presumably ethnic slurs would constitute mental harm of a criminal nature — as they do in the state of Massachusetts, where an ethnic slur

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may result in automatic imprisonment. Under this act, every member of the City Council of Chicago, black and white, Christian and Jew, could find himself on trial in the Hague. Ethnic tensions there have risen high enough that the council had to introduce a bill banning racial and sexual insults from council meetings. The President could not have picked a better site for his dramatic gesture.

Each nation in the world, if it is really a nation, must insist upon being the judge of its own interests or run the risk of allowing its enemies to judge for it. The principle of sovereignty used to be understood by nearly everyone in the United States. There is, however, a growing number of political ignoramuses in high places. The United Nations Association of the United States, under its chairman Elliot Richardson (the sanctimonious attorney general), recently called for a UN arms registry that would monitor all international arms sales, including those engaged in by the United States. The sale of arms to our allies and supporters plays a vital part in US foreign policy, and we simply cannot afford to turn control over to any multinational organization.

In the past ten years the United States has not only signed the Genocide Convention, but our government has also begun to use the language of democratic globalism, as if we were an ideological state like the Soviet Union or the government of the French Revolution, as if the national interest had to come second to the interest of global revolution.

If this were not bad enough, the UN General Assembly almost simultaneously opened its debate on an international children's rights convention as its first move toward commemorating the tenth anniversary of The Year of the Child (1979). The General Assembly's Third Committee is expected to give its approval to a Polish resolution in favor of adopting the contents. Why Poland? Libya and North Vietnam have human rights records that are almost as distinguished.

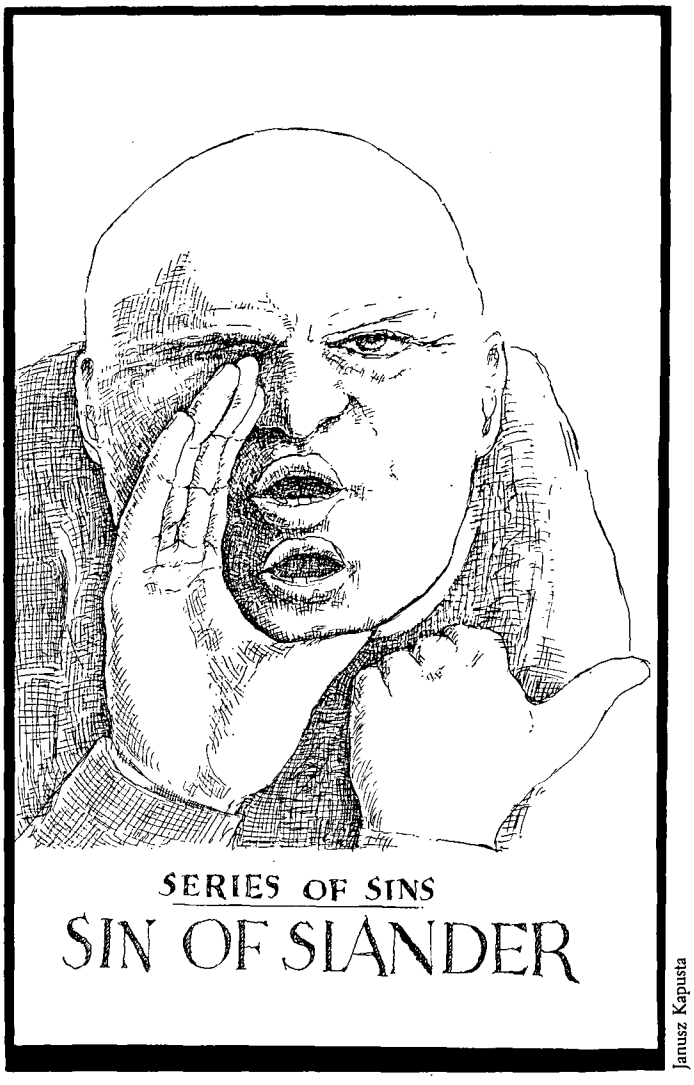
The draft includes a few salutary observations on family life, but even they are couched in the pernicious language of rights. It is hard to say what the final document will look like, but much of the paper (including state laws in the US) spawned by The Year of the Child included freedom from bigotry (i.e., the belief that some religions are better than others) and access to sex education as basic components of a child's right to be brought up in a wholesome family setting.

The draft convention does contain several strange provisions: adoption will now be subject to international law, which presumably makes it more complicated for Americans to adopt foreign children. "Children" will also be guaranteed immunity from conscription up to the age of 15 or even 17.

This seems an acceptable notion — until a nation finds itself fighting for its survival. Besides, in matters of native defense governments should beware of even appearing to surrender the smallest particle of their sovereignty.

It was our government, by the way, that insisted upon the most bizarre provision: the right of association. Presumably this means that children have the right to divorce their parents, as in the famous case of Walter Polovchak, who refused to return to the USSR with his family. On that occasion, the US State Department successfully prevented the parents from taking their own child back home with them. Of course, most decent Americans sympathized with Walter's desire to stay here, whatever his motives. But remember this: if we allow the government to divide an alien family, it will not be long before it will do the same to us. It was bad enough getting the State Department involved in a family decision. Imagine how much worse it will be when the UN begins to interfere.

(TF)



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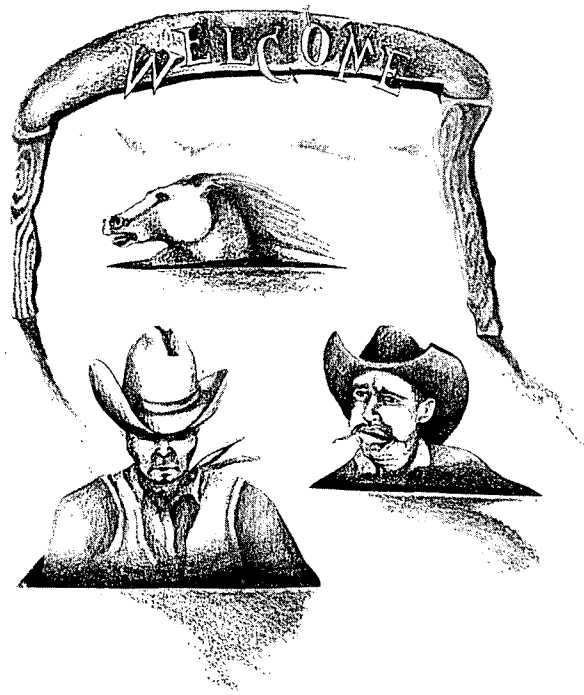

Epitaph for Tombstone

by Odie B. Faulk

Edward Lawrence Schieffelin's story seems like something made up by a Hollywood writer long on cliché and short on imagination, for his silver strike epitomized the hopes and dreams of every sourdough prospector who ever wandered the lonely mountains, valleys, and streams of the American West. For years he searched in vain, living on the edge of starvation while nourishing hopes of discovering a bonanza.

In the summer of 1877 Schieffelin was in southern Arizona, still the haunt of bronco Apaches lifting scalps, prospecting the San Pedro Valley. When he came in to Fort Huachuca to get supplies, the soldiers would ask if he had found anything. When he replied that he had not yet made a discovery, they told him all he would find would be his tombstone.

The result of his search was his fabulous mine discovery the following year. Some of the ore assayed at $12,000 to $15,000 a ton in silver and $1,200 to $1,500 in gold.

What followed was predictable—it had happened many times before in the West. There was a boom that brought thousands to the region. In 1879 a city arose, its 15,000 residents making it the largest community between San Antonio and San Francisco. And with the wry humor for which the West was noted, the town was named Tombstone, and its leading newspaper was dubbed the *Epitaph*.

The Tombstone district was a place of hard-rock mining, which required large capital investment to erect the necessary crushing mills and sink shafts through granite. The miners in the region were company employees, men whose toil was monotonous and back-breaking—a ten-hour shift below ground mucking and drilling for $3.50 a day. When they got off work, they returned to their primitive shacks for uninviting meals of coffee, beans, and greasy pork. Under such conditions they suffered from many diseases, among them diarrhea, dysentery, chills, fever, and malaria.

Men who led such lives could not find sufficient relaxation by sitting around and playing cards with each other, for most of them were young, vigorous, and single. So they went where the lights were bright. There they drank and gambled and lied, and many sought the brief company of "doves of the roost," the girls who plied the most ancient of trades—and who died all too soon of disease or whiskey or opium.

However, most residents of Tombstone were respectable, family people who hoped for and dreamed of a better future

Odie B. Faulk is emeritus professor of history at Northeastern State University in Oklahoma.

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for themselves and their city. They established churches, erected schools, formed fraternal organizations, opened stores, voted funds for a town library; some even met to read each other their literary endeavors.

Tombstone's day in the economic sun was brief. In 1886 the mines, which were down about 500 feet, began to flood, and gradually they shut. In 1901 there was a resurgence of mining activity as better pumps were able to handle the water, but the deeper the mines went, the greater the problem. By 1911 the bonanza was over.

Thereafter, as the business activity of the town moved ever slower, there was more time for talk, for remembering, for reminiscing. The economy might be anemic, but the legends improved with age. The heroes and villains of the old-timers' stories—the Earps, the Clantons, the McLowrys—had moved away or else had died, and thus there were few participants still in Tombstone to contradict the accounts and anecdotes that were told and retold, embellishments growing on each like desert flowers on a cactus after a rain.

There was "Rotten Row," that part of town inhabited by Tombstone's legal fraternity, and there was the "Tenderloin District" wherein lived Blonde Marie, French Lil, Nosey Kate, Lizette the Flying Nymph, and a host of others. And who could forget China Mary, who sold cheese, Chinese foods, imported knickknacks, and opium, and who was widely famous for her generosity to miners down on their luck? Tombstone could even celebrate an 1884 lynching, when it seemed justice had miscarried; a mob broke into the jail and hanged the miscreant from a telegraph pole, and the coroner declared his death resulted "from emphysema of the lungs—a disease common in high altitudes." Yes, Tombstone had a host of memories, but that was cold comfort to a town that was dying, that would, in fact, have joined the ranks of other ghost towns in the West had it not been the seat of Cochise County.

Then in 1928 one old-timer, a deputy sheriff named Billy Breakenridge, published *Helldorado* and received national attention for the stories he told about lawlessness in the "good old days." This book caused some residents to decide to try to lure visitors with a "pioneer" celebration. In October of 1929 they staged "Helldorado Week." This took place during the week of October 26, the date of the famed gunfight at the OK Corral between the town thugs, the Earp brothers and their cohorts, and the country thugs, the Clantons and the McLowrys. Nineteen twenty-nine seemed an appropriate year to begin this celebration, for it was the 50th anniversary of the founding of the town.

Several blocks of the old business district were roped off for Helldorado Week. Twenty Yuma Indians with varying degrees of musical talent were imported to serve as the "Helldorado Band." Dressed in gaudy, feathered Plains Indian headbonnets, Navajo shirts, and Hopi turquoise jewelry, they smiled and played as their conductor used a six-shooter for a baton.

The parade consisted of covered wagons, buggies, and buckboards with women and children dressed in relics from trunks and attics. There were prospectors and cowboys in beards, flannel shirts, high-heeled boots, and broad-brimmed hats, all carrying sufficient hardware for several wars.

Daily there was a daring holdup of the stage followed by a charge of a sheriff's posse to interrupt the robbery. This ended in a heroic gun battle in which the forces of good triumphed. Another daily feature was the killing of a prospector by a drunken desperado and his prompt lynching by a righteous mob. And the Bird Cage Theater and the Crystal Palace resounded in the evenings as of old with skits and blackouts—and whiskey flowing briskly.

Free entertainment during Helldorado Week included baton twirling, fancy shooting, boxing, wrestling, and open-air dances, while a carnival that had come to town provided sideshows, fortune-telling, and bearded ladies.

The highlight of the celebration was a reenactment of the Gunfight at the OK Corral. And the next day everyone could read the details in the *Epitaph*, which during this week once again became a daily paper.

One old-timer who came back for the celebration was John Clum, the founding editor of the *Epitaph*. He viewed the celebration in company with aging rancher Billy Fourr. As they discussed what was transpiring, they agreed that they had no idea what the word "Helldorado" meant, but from the cover on the program and the literature associated with the event, they concluded it meant something "lurid—and alluring."

Clum later wrote that he and Fourr failed to find in the presentation "any semblance of the youthful Tombstone we had known so well." In fact, as Clum noted, in Tombstone's 50-year history there had been only one gun battle on the city's streets. In 1881, the year when most of the excitement had occurred, only six men had met a violent death within the city's limits, and the lynching party of 1884 had been organized in the town of Bisbee, not Tombstone.

Clum was incensed by Helldorado Week. "Criminals and crime existed in Tombstone during those so-called 'hectic days' when it was a booming mining camp," he wrote. "But dissipation and disorder and lawlessness and murder were not the chief occupations of the citizens of Tombstone when I was a resident there in the early '80s—although that impression was emphatically conveyed by the high spots in the Helldorado publicity and the Helldorado program. This is not fair simply because it is not true."

Fourr likewise was incensed, asking Clum, "Don't you remember that away back there in 1881, when you were mayor, the men seldom grew anything but a mustache, and there was a city ordinance forbidding anyone but a peace officer to carry firearms within the city limits?"

"Well, Billy," Clum replied, "you must remember that we were not giving a HELLDORADO show away back there in 1881."

In 1929 the citizens of Tombstone were fortunate that Helldorado Week was a success as entertainment if not as truth, for that same year the residents of Cochise County voted to move the county seat to Bisbee.

Also fortunately for Tombstone, Billy Breakenridge's success spawned other literary efforts. Walter Noble Burns produced *Tombstone*, in which he began erecting the pedestal on which Stuart Lake would place *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshall*. This piece of fiction gave the public a hero, a Galahad, a pasteboard character fit to take the lead in that uniquely American morality play, the Western. His

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Earp was shy, unassuming, courteous to women, modest, violent only when forced into it, and deadly in his righteous wrath.

The moviemakers likewise discovered Tombstone, seeing commercial potential in the emerging myth of the city. Like the fictioneers of the pulp magazines, they transformed the town into King Arthur's England. Earp became Sir Galahad and his friends the knights of the Round Table, while his enemies were the wicked earls to be destroyed. Consider, for example, a less-than-epic feature in 1941 from Paramount entitled *Tombstone: The Town Too Tough To Die*. This starred Richard Dix, Victor Jory, and Edgar Buchanan, and began with a statement superimposed over the opening scenes:

I am the voice of the past
Of the days when I was a territory
Overrun with bad men of all kinds
  Rustlers
  Dance-hall girls
  Outlaws and gamblers
The bad men of Arizona were strangling me with
  their lawlessness
For my existence, I am indebted to one man
He became a living symbol of respect for the law
  WYATT EARP

When such books and films began to appear, there were old-timers who remembered that Wyatt Earp had fled Arizona under indictment for murder. But gradually the old-timers died or else began remembering themselves as participants in those epic battles of yore, heroes basking in reflected glory. And the money brought to Tombstone by the annual flock of tourists wanting to see the actual sites of those battles-for-the-right made a new crop of believers.

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In Tombstone's 50-year history there had been only one gun battle on the city's streets. In 1881, the year when most of the excitement had occurred, only six men had met a violent death within the city's limits, and the lynching party of 1884 had been organized in the town of Bisbee, not Tombstone.

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Promoters came to the city to cash in on the glories of a West that never was. Artifacts long since abandoned suddenly became pioneer treasures to be viewed for a fee. Pistols acquired anywhere in the West became, if not Wyatt's own handgun, at least that of Doc Holliday.

The residents of Tombstone may be partially responsible for this packaging of plastic history, but in their holding of Helldorado Week each year they are close in spirit to the pioneers who founded the town — they are mining the only vein of ore left.

Thereby they have become different. Most cities in the western United States, once they achieved a certain maturity, not only turned their backs on their frontier heritage, but deliberately tried to hide the crudities associated with their birth. They downplayed the violence and the raw conditions of their past and stressed a cultural heritage more evident to them than to their ancestors. Descendants of pioneers transformed their forebears into gentlemen, ladies, and philanthropists, and they created historical societies whose function, all too often, was to launder history.

But not Tombstone. It glories in its frontier beginnings. Barroom brawls, robberies, beatings, a lynching, even murder became fit subjects for local chroniclers and a loose outline for reenactments. In this depiction and presentation, Tombstone's history has become as false as the fronts of Tombstone's stores — and by city ordinance all new structures must be built in Territorial style.

If in the grand tradition of the Western there is a villain in the corruption of Tombstone's history, the bad guys are not those presenting the city as something extraordinarily lurid. Rather it is the public, which pays to see this distortion. The average tourist comes to see what he wants to believe was the past. But part of that is gone, never to return, and the rest never existed. He can only see a false representation — and in the process be separated from his money. If he is willing to pay to see a plastic replica of what he wants — even needs — the Old West to have been, it is difficult to blame the people who give it to him.

And the average tourist goes to places such as Tombstone, deny it though he may, to see the lurid and the violent, not the prosaic and the ordinary. There is some dark strain in the human character that attracts us to evil men and dark deeds. We identify with the man with the gun, and we lust to do battle — at least vicariously. Why else the emphasis on violence that is so much a part of the literature, movies, and TV shows about the West? Our heroes' deeds have become part of our folklore until the myth has become reality and the truth is lost.

Symbolic of the myth and reality of Tombstone is Boothill Cemetery, which greets the visitor as he drives into town via the Benson highway. When the process of sprucing up the town for the first Helldorado celebration was underway, it was discovered that most of the original headboards there had rotted and many of the graves were unmarked. Some members of the restoration committee worked to check the records before new headboards were erected, but the records were so sketchy that some of those buried there could not be identified. This did not prevent the erection of a full slate of headboards, however. Some names were coined from thin air, along with colorful epitaphs either made up or else borrowed from other cemeteries in the West.

This was the same Boothill Cemetery in which the better element of the Tombstone of 1881 did not want their dead buried, so they started a new cemetery for themselves and their loved ones. Yet today no tourist pays to see that second cemetery, which can be viewed for free. No, the cars stop at the first cemetery — Boothill — the one filled with men "who died with their boots on!"

Somehow this seems fitting. Perhaps this is part of the price we pay for insisting on living in a world of simultaneous myth and reality. ©

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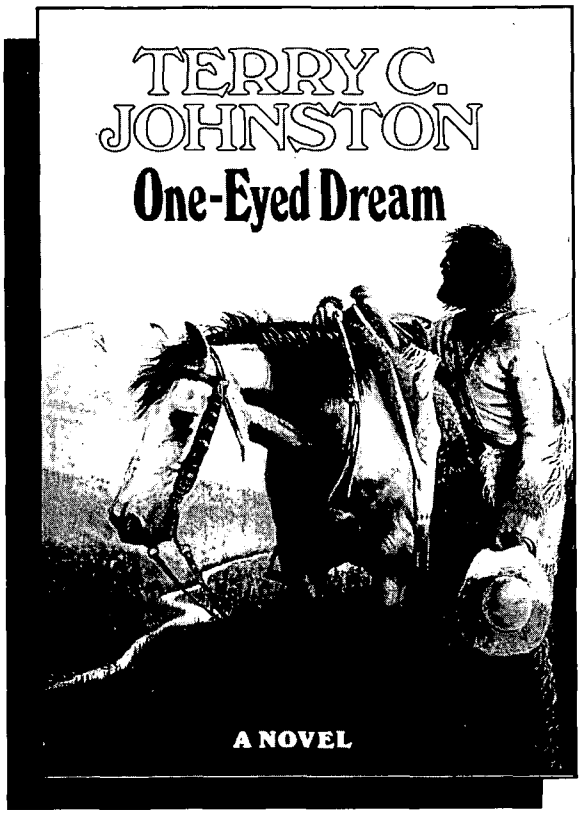

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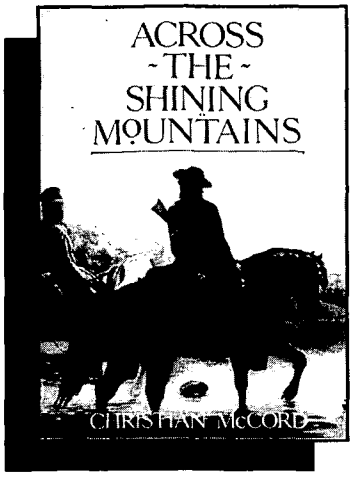

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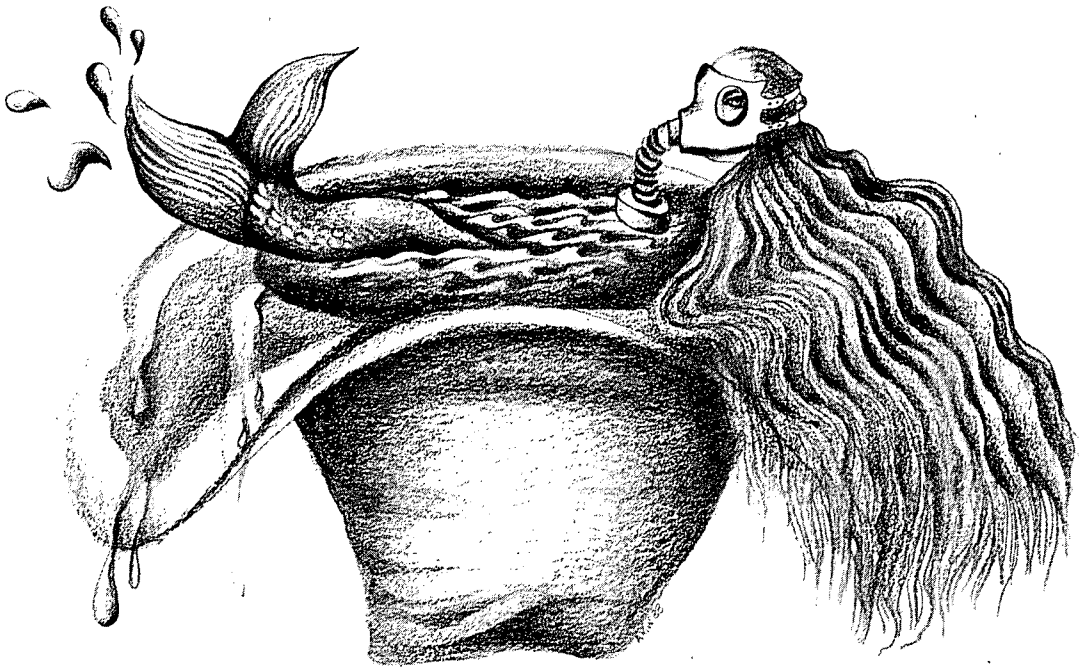

The Flies of Summer

by William Mills

Last summer I was standing next to a great bull buffalo in western Kansas. He was mad and had a right to be. My buddy Joe Kramer, along with other men from Kansas Fish & Game, had this great American bison in an animal squeeze while they took a blood sample and gave him a shot. All this activity was part of Kansas' effort to maintain a few buffalo in the state. The Westerner's relationship to the buffalo has been loaded with irony. In 1889 the last buffalo in Kansas was killed, and in 1955 animals brought from the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma were the descendants of 15 animals donated by the New York Zoological Park.

As a few flies buzzed about the buffalo bull, I was reminded of some other flies, those that Edmund Burke alluded to as he reflected upon the past's gift to the present. "[U]nmindful of what they have received from their ancestors, or of what is due to their posterity, [the temporary possessors and life-renters] [w]ould act as if they were the entire masters. . . . No one generation could link with another. Men would become little better than flies of a summer."

The American West is freighted with the past's gift of instruction for the present, in its mythology, its seemingly limitless landscape, its severely beautiful nature. At a time when the Laputans reside on the Floating Islands of Washington and Wall Street above one coast and Hollywood above the other, it is imperative that the center, or Heartland, hold steady to moor their experiments. This became clearer to me as I moved up and down the Arkansas River Valley working on a book about the river.

As you travel westward along the Arkansas and leave Dodge City, most of the trees are left behind. You have also passed the 100th meridian. This imaginary line marks the beginning of what once was called the "Great American Desert," pointing to a land where the annual rainfall drops to 16 inches or less. From the start, few people out here had to be instructed about the value of water, something their cousins east of the Mississippi took for granted, or thought they could take for granted until recently when much of it has been poisoned. I say the travelers west knew about the scarcity and thus the value of water; but this is not to say that they understood the many limitations that this put upon the land. As we know from Wallace Stegner's book *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*, John Wesley Powell's warnings about the limitations that settlers needed to recognize were largely ignored. If we could have acted on Powell's advice, as Bernard DeVoto has remarked, "incalculable loss would have been prevented and the United States would be

William Mills is the author of a book on the Arkansas River, recently published by the University of Arkansas Press.

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happier and wealthier than it is."

If you have recently left the eastern United States and are traveling west, or were reared in the East where water and roads shift and turn as they come up against hills and mountains, it is disorienting to go about the West, where so many of the roads are straight lines that seem to disappear forever in the four directions. Mostly the roads cross at a sharp 90 degrees, and from the air, it looks like Descartes had his way. The grid of sections (640 acres) and quarter sections (160 acres) was an abstraction imposed by government offices in the East. If a quarter section was good enough for Iowa or Illinois, it must be good enough for anyplace else.

It is this kind of detached planning (from the eastern government offices) that Powell was trying to warn against. He had been out West. He had walked over part of the West and gone down the Colorado River. His idea of the West was grounded in the real thing. He explained that homesteading by a family on 160 acres was doomed; such a parcel could not sustain them. A quarter section couldn't grow enough stock, and irrigation was impossible for most of the settlers. The sad proof of his rightness lives in the fact that our national grasslands are made up largely of lands bought back from failed homesteaders in an effort to give them a start somewhere else.

My own focus regarding the Arkansas River and its great basin reflected similarities and differences in the natural communities (which are great: alpine in the Rockies, prairie in eastern Colorado and western Kansas, and hardwood forests and bottoms in Oklahoma and Arkansas). I was also interested in how man had related to these communities and to the river, how he had changed these worlds after entering them. A student of the river is confronted with the metal mine pollution very near the Arkansas' source in Leadville, Colorado; uranium ore contamination of the groundwater in Cañon City, Colorado; and the depletion of the groundwater throughout the prairie portion in Colorado and Kansas. For a start. As each part of the Arkansas River's story unfolded, it resembled other stories throughout the American West, the Western world, and, increasingly, the world. The more you read about and study such matters, the more you encounter the problem of limits. We are told repeatedly that the earth is a finite system, with finite resources, but we are reminded by bumper stickers on the backs of Winnebagos and Airstreams, "We're spending our children's inheritance." Somehow we have lost the idea of limits.

The buffalo has become a symbol for this recognition of a modern devastation. We are told by Peter Matthiessen that there were an estimated 60 million buffalo on the Great Plains well into the 19th century, "probably the greatest animal congregations that ever existed on earth." The animal is extinct in the wilds now. That is a fairly impressive record no matter how you look at it: destroying the greatest animal congregation that ever existed on earth. This we managed, we must remind ourselves, with merely horses and rifles. Now we have . . . well, probably no need to go into all that.

A large number of people lately feel that the genie has got out of the bottle and he is us. It's as if you have the buffalo bull by the tail and as he races across the prairie, someone is yelling, "Turn him, turn him." Such a sense of helplessness has generated an urgency on the part of many for a myth that can engender responsibility for the present and the future. Several essays in a recent issue of this magazine (February 1988) engaged this large question as it pertains to the environment. It is clear that thoughtless narcissism (protecting animals that look more like us), or a detached urban puritanism (one lady was mad about a polluted swamp out our way, and the "pollution" turned out to be duckweed), is not going to serve. Our great grasslands, like our swamps and arctic "wastes," had until recently been ignored while we went about paving the rest of the country. They were thought to be forbidding, not in the top ten places to go; but now that is changing.

The Arkansas River begins in the snow on Mt. Arkansas at 13,795 feet. If you have trekked from below, you have passed treeline and entered a great mountain hall of the Mosquito Range in the Colorado Rockies. In the high, thin air, with your back to the peak, looking down the amphitheater created by surrounding mountains, it is easy to feel the presencing of the world. If a people were to live here for a long time, perhaps the mountain would take on a divine presence itself and, given enough time, would become a god, like Mt. Fujiyama in Japan, like some in Nepal. It is possible that it was for some American Indians, though this part of the valley is not rich in Indian artifacts. The people who came up the valley in the 19th century were of a different sort. Down river a little was the famous Cripple Creek gold strike. Just over Mt. Arkansas is Leadville, famous for its 1880 gold strike in California Gulch and its later silver strike.

Nestled between the Sawatch range and the Mosquito, Leadville, Colorado, is currently the site of a Superfund cleanup. California Gulch is still in the news. After the first strike the gold miners left ten miles of gravel heaps and cutover land that in turn led to a steady source of mud entering the Arkansas. Then the silver miners left miles of tunnels. In order to solve the underground water problem, the Yak Tunnel was finished around 1906; miles of mine water started draining into California Gulch and then into the Arkansas. In 1953 the federal government constructed the Leadville Drainage Tunnel and it, too, drained into the river.

Most heavy metal contamination of the river was not obvious. But one February day in 1983, a wooden retaining wall collapsed in Yak Tunnel, pouring disastrous quantities of contaminates into the river. One of them, pyrite, sometimes called "yellow boy," is visible. A pumping station 40 miles downstream that diverts drinking water to Colorado Springs had to be shut down. That brought on a great outcry and a visit from Colorado Republican Congressman Ken Kramer to the EPA in Denver. A study has been made now, and the first part of the cleanup is underway. Stephen Voynick, who has written about hard-rock mining, and specifically about mine metal contamination, has remarked that "metal mine drainage pollution is a national heritage, sort of a deferred payment for the reckless glories of frontier mining."

Many people are under the impression that once Superfund money is spent on a cleanup, that's the end of it. Wrong. The US government turns around and sues all of

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the individual property owners to get the money back, even though they may have acquired the land after the damage was done by someone else. Which brings us back to Burke's flies of a summer. "Unmindful of . . . what is due to their posterity, [the temporary possessors and life-renters] [w]ould act as if they were the entire masters." Some of the pioneers could be right messy. They were on the way elsewhere, toward something over the horizon. Perhaps more land, more water, more gold, even something intangible, boundless. After all, shouldn't a man's reach exceed his grasp? On the way, however, the scene sometimes resembles the aftermath of recent barbarians whizzing down the interstate,

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We are told repeatedly that the earth is a finite system, with finite resources, but we are reminded by bumper stickers on the backs of Winnebagos and Airstreams, "We're spending our children's inheritance."

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dumping McDonald's portable, disposable dinner services for ten. Nowadays nature is something to push against, to move around, get out of the way, get on top of.

There is hardly any way to talk for long about the American West, or certainly about the Arkansas River Valley, without the subject of water and irrigation coming up. Water is on everybody's mind because there isn't much of it. Taking a look at what's happened with water in Kansas and Colorado sheds a little light on the way we do things in the modern world. When the wagons were rolling west along the Santa Fe Trail, they stayed as close as was reasonable to the Arkansas: up on solid ground for the wagons but near enough to fill the barrels with water. If they took a short cut at some place like Cimarron Crossing, they had to get to the next water on the Cimarron River or die from thirst; they also ran a much higher risk of encountering Indians. But most of these people were just trying to get through the Great American Desert and on west of the Rockies where they wouldn't have to worry about water so much. They left wagon tracks (some are still on a friend of mine's farm around Deerfield, Kansas), and they left most of the water.

After the Civil War, there was great excitement about settling the plains. The railroad magnates back East touted the plains as a potential Garden of Eden, another one of those abstractions imposed by one world on another. There weren't enough people in the US to move matters along as briskly as the magnates wanted, so drummers were sent over to Russia and Germany to recruit. No one had paid any attention to Powell about the inadequacy of quarter-section farms, and consequently great numbers of families failed. But some hardy, lucky souls endured.

One way they did it was by using ditch irrigation. This got going in the 1870's and hit its stride in the 1880's. More than 400 miles of canals and ditches were built in Garden City, Kansas. To be effective, ditch irrigation requires diverting the flow of water several miles above the land to be irrigated, at the headgates, and then needs a two- to three-foot fall. This works out fine for the valley in eastern Colorado and western Kansas, where the Arkansas falls about eight feet per mile. The canals can arc their way through the farms and be released through smaller gates at each field.

But ditch irrigation had its problems early on. By the end of the 1880's, cyclical drought and increased use of the Arkansas had resulted in the river going completely dry in western Kansas. If there was little snowmelt and rain for that year, the drain on the system ended up at roughly zero. Ditch irrigation has a long tradition, dating back at least to the cradle of civilization in the Middle East, and was used by the American Indians in the West long before the homesteaders got to Kansas. But it has never really been without problems, one of the greatest being increased salinization of the land. The farming communities along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the Hopi in the Southwest either died out or moved on when this happened.

When the center-pivot pump came into being and proliferated, an entirely new element was put into the equation of the river. Water is pumped from several hundred feet in the aquifer below, and is moved very efficiently down a long distribution system, which is on wheels. A whole quarter section can be watered in about 24 hours. The water being used is fossil water, and that's a lot like topsoil. It takes a long time to accumulate and when it's gone, it's gone.

A lot of people are on the farmers' case for center-pivot irrigation—a lot of people who live in town, but also dry-land farmers and ditch irrigators in the valley. In one water district comprising 13 counties in western Kansas, the Kansas Water Office has predicted that in 50 years, the groundwater level in the Cimarron basin will drop 79 percent, and in the Arkansas basin, 49 percent. The ditch irrigators are mad because they claim the dropping water level is affecting the volume of flow in the river. Before any center-pivot pumping started, the river sometimes down-cut enough to pick up flow from the aquifer itself. The people over at Cheyenne Bottoms refuge are mad because there often isn't enough water to divert for the thousands of birds that use the refuge. (I myself am mostly confounded to see how any thoughtful vision of nature could have averted the advent of center-pivot irrigation. What was more traditional than digging a well to get water for your farm?)

Once the evidence started rolling in that more was going on than merely pumping water out from under your own land, then a different kind of problem emerged. Increasingly, the expensive equipment required by modern "agribusiness" meant nobody wanted to stop once all that money had been invested. Bringing up greed and posterity at that point was like a canary singing in a wind storm. Which is partly to say that we're never going to get it just right. That's an Edenist notion—getting it just right, or immanentizing the eschaton, as the Eric Voegelin T-shirts say.

What is to be done? In the case of the irrigators, as soon as they pay off their $50,000-per-rig notes at the bank, they will have to set them over on the back 40 and let 'em rust, because the cost of the gas to run the wells at greater depths will serve as a limit. But that kind of virtue is like bragging on your virginity when you ain't been asked. Wendell Berry has

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diagnosed part of the problem when he notes, "Our farms are endangered because—like the interstate highways or modern hospitals or modern universities—they cannot be inexpensively used. To be usable at all they require great expense."

We need to make an effort to arrive at a principled, articulate stewardship that will help us stop the marauding and the devastation, and cut out some of this "devil take the hindmost" greed for what's left of the water in the Arkansas River, or the other western rivers that now seem to be regarded only as waters for cities. Colorado and Kansas are having at it in a Supreme Court case, which is to decide who is the greedy one, *vice* being now what the Court says it is. Meanwhile, Denver, Colorado Springs, Phoenix, and Los Angeles are busy buying up the water rights (might makes rights, right?) and having it brought to them by what is called "transmountain water diversion." Given the madness in the cities where the young gangsters and drug lords ("lords of the flies?") seem to be winning, taking the water seems a lot like feral progeny devouring the mother at long distance. Soon I expect we can look forward to a featurette called "transmountain prisoner diversion" where they go to Wyoming. (You remember the news item about certain sheriffs in Wyoming wanting to close their jails because they didn't have anybody to put in them? They shouldn't have let this get out.) We've already got transmountain nuclear waste diversion in the West. In the face of this, we have Hegel saying that "only the modern city offers the mind a field in which it can become aware of itself." I'm not kidding.

The Arkansas River Valley, which has the ingredients of a community, has broken down into factionalism, a breakdown that reflects a kind of quarter-section vision that embraces no sense of transcendence whatsoever. Thomas Molnar has remarked that "one cannot harness technology without denoting science as a master-concept." True enough. The times seem readier now, however, to admit that science is not the master-concept it was considered to be in the 19th century. Apocalyptic anticipations drive many, as never before, to reexamine their relationship to nature and to each other. But nobody ever said it was going to be easy.

Farming the grasslands will have to be rethought as an art, rather than as running a factory. Remember when being a physician was practicing an art, the art of bringing about health? Farming must in the long run bring forth health through nurturing healthy creatures from a healthy land. The potential farmer will have to listen to what the land is saying, rather than telling the land what he wants to hear. He might consider the land in the way that Michelangelo considered what figure might be brought forth from a particular stone, rather than imposing, no matter what, an idea hatched purely in his head.

Vincent Scully, writing about the Minoan dance, remarks that instead of celebrating subtle man who finally killed the bull, the unreasoning power of nature, the dance "celebrated both men and women together as accepting nature's law, adoring it, adding to their own power precisely as they seized it close and adjusted their rhythms to its force." This is a better story than the one the buffalo bull reminds us of, the annihilation of the largest aggregation of wild animals in the world. Yet we begin again, as we did that summer day in Kansas, releasing him to rejoin his kind. ◈

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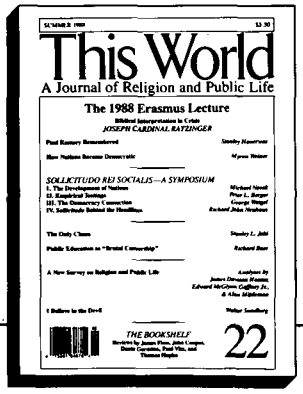

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Decline of the West

A Western View on the Fall of the American Civilization

by Richard D. Lamm

Imagine yourself going ahead in time—60 years ahead. Imagine yourself in the People's Republic of North America, in the year 2050.

In discussing the rise and fall of the American civilization, it will be necessary to examine the situation at the last time when historians felt this society could have saved itself from disintegration. Consequently, I will use statistics from the early 1980's. Now nearly 70 years old, these figures remain extremely important, because they prove that even though the warning signals of an empire in liquidation were flashing all around, few did anything to retard the unraveling of this once-marvelous civilization.

Like all other great civilizations that disintegrated, the United States of America let its economy stagnate. In 1955 the United States had 44 percent of the world's economic product, an economy eight times larger than Japan's, the world's highest productivity rate, an educational system that was second to none, and a constant string of trade surpluses.

By 1985 the generation in charge of America in the 60's and 70's had run up a $2 trillion debt, and the US slipped to the lowest rate of productivity growth of any in the industrialized world. It had the highest percentage of obsolete plants, the lowest percentage of capital investment, and the highest number of functional illiterates in the industrialized world. What happened?

The wealth of a nation lies in its productivity growth—in its people. In the early 1970's the United States went from the highest rate of productivity growth in the industrialized world to the lowest. Its productivity was one-half the German rate, one-third the French rate, one-fourth the Japanese rate. From the first oil shock to 1983, increases in annual productivity in the United States were roughly one-seventh of those of its major trading partners.

Second of all, it let its federal debt get out of control. Neither political party was able to say no. The Democrats couldn't say no to social problems, and the Republicans couldn't say no to military spending. The debt was not considered an economic problem, it was considered a political problem.

So by 1986, the federal debt for just that year was greater than the gross national product of 158 of the 167 countries in the world. Just to pay the interest on the federal debt cost $458 million a day, and it took the individual income tax from everybody living west of the Mississippi River just to pay the interest on the federal debt. The interest payments on the federal debt took 70 to 80 percent of the nation's savings pool. Christmas is an occasion when children tell Santa Claus what they want and adults pay for it; debt is an occasion when adults tell the government what they want and the kids pay for it.

The next disabling factor was the trade deficit, which was at least partly caused by the overvalued dollar, which was in turn caused by the federal debt. In 1983 the United States ran up the largest trade deficit that history had ever seen. The following year it doubled. In 1985 the United States became a debtor nation and in 1986 it became the world's largest debtor nation—owing more than Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela put together. In the decade leading up to 1986 the United States bought almost one-half trillion

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dollars more in goods from abroad than it sold abroad.

Why did this happen? First, other countries blocked United States entry into their markets and dumped many of their goods at subsidized rates on the American marketplace. In a marketplace that was really not free, even the genius of the American free enterprise system could not compete with large subsidies.

Second, the United States did not adequately invest in new plants and equipment. Back in the 1970's and 80's, the crucial turning time of the trade imbalance, Japan invested 10 percent of its gross national product in new plants and equipment while America was investing 3 percent. By the early 1980's, the United States had the highest percentage of obsolete plants, lowest percentage of capital investment, and lowest growth in savings of any major industrialized country. The nations with new plants and new machines, those that maintained high productivity and high quality, dominated both the new and old markets. This inevitably undercut the United States' ability to adequately fund its future needs.

Next, America got a reputation for shoddy goods. With an irony that defies description, the United States and Japan, in 40 years, traded reputations. Japan's reputation used to be an international joke. But by the 1980's, American rental companies reported that cars made in the United States required two or three times more servicing than comparable Japanese cars. A Harvard Business School study showed that an average of 70 defects showed up on American assembly line products for every one on a Japanese assembly line.

In Japan the issuance of new patents during the crucial 1970's and 80's rose more than 350 percent; meanwhile, in the United States, it fell by 10 percent.

Americans ceased to be hard-minded Yankee traders. Japan and other countries had been taking economic advantage of the United States for years. Japanese nontariff barriers cheated America, and Japanese custom procedures had been outrageously time-consuming. For example, the United States inspected Japanese cars by the fleet, while the Japanese inspected American cars one at a time.

America's top ten exports in 1985 contained only one manufacturing item — airplane engines.

America's top ten imports were all high value-added manufacturing items — all from Japan or Germany.

Forty short years after winning World War II, the United States was in many ways subservient to Japan — serving as its natural resource colony.

We became equally inefficient in other ways. The legal system clearly contributed to the United States' uncompetitiveness. While Japan trained engineers and scientists, the United States trained lawyers and accountants. One in 400 Americans were lawyers, while one in 10,000 Japanese were lawyers. Japan trained 1,000 engineers for every 100 lawyers. The United States trained 1,000 lawyers for every 100 engineers. Forty percent of American Rhodes scholars went to law school. It should surprise no one what happened. The US became the most litigious nation on earth; and by 1985 an insurance crisis of unbelievable proportions affected everyone from the owners of neighborhood pubs, to physicians, to local and state governments. The United States didn't invest its educational resources any better than it invested its industrial resources.

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The doctors became as much a part of the problem as the lawyers. The health care system grew bloated and inefficient, taking more of the gross national product and representing a greater share of the overhead of American goods. In 1985 the US spent $1,500 per capita on health care. Great Britain spent $400 per capita on health care, and Singapore spent $200 on health care, yet we all had approximately the same results. When the health care system took 11 cents out of every dollar spent in America, it was obviously adding a component to overhead that made American goods increasingly uncompetitive. The US manufactured artificial hearts but closed its steel mills.

Untold resources were spent in the campaign against death. American history became the story of the prodigal parents. Failure to reform Social Security and other pension systems in preparation for the retirement of what was called the baby-boom generation (a generation whose numbers vastly exceeded those of its parents) led to the collapse. The time-honored intergenerational contract by which the working young cared for retired parents broke down. The children of the baby-boomer adults simply could not afford the burden, so they refused to shoulder it. The writing on the wall was clear. In the 1980's, demographic projections revealed beyond doubt that the ratio of workers to retirees would be less than 2:1 in the year 2050. Yet no action was taken.

The average enlisted man in the military retired at age 39; the average officer at 43. All received immediate pensions, all indexed, and all came with health benefits. Twenty-six percent of the people who retired from the military retired while they were still in their 30's. In 1984, the average career soldier received $228,000 for retirement payments during his lifetime, plus free medical care. This would compare with the retirement payments to a pensioner in the private sector which were closer to $37,000.

Federal civil service employees were able to retire at age 55 with no reduction in pension. Four out of five federal workers ultimately got two pension checks—a federal civil service pension, and a second from the private sector—in addition to the Social Security that many received. In 1984, the federal government spent more on the retirement of its employees than it did on all the programs for the elderly and needy put together. In 1982, the civil service retirement program cost $31.4 billion, while the combined total of food stamps, housing assistance, and welfare was only $26.9 billion.

These pension systems in effect pushed individuals into early retirement—at the very same time that the cost of supporting many of these healthy individuals was pushing the federal government toward economic disaster.

Other undisciplined systems, such as Medicare, certainly contributed to the fiscal insanity of the time. The actuarial Medicare benefits that were granted to an eligible retiree were 28.6 times the amount paid in by that individual. Medicare ran a $300 billion deficit by the year 1992, and contributed to the eventual collapse of the American credit system.

While pampering the elderly, the nation turned its back on the young. The United States let its system of education deteriorate into a "rising tide of mediocrity." All international studies showed that American students were not in the top third, were not in the top two-thirds, but were always in the lower third. In mathematics American students were the lowest of all nations tested. An eighth grader in Japan knew more math than an MBA in the United States. A Swedish seventeen-year-old knew twice as much mathematics as an American seventeen-year-old. Japanese and Taiwanese students were ahead of American students from the first day they entered school, and by the time a Japanese student graduated he had 11 IQ points more than an American student, and had the equivalent in classroom time of an American college graduate. In 1985 Japan graduated 95 percent of its students from high schools, while the United States graduated less than 75 percent.

At the same time, America had the largest number of functional illiterates of any industrialized nation. Twenty-three million American adults were functionally illiterate. As many as one in five American workers were functionally illiterate. Between 40 and 50 percent of all urban students were estimated to have serious reading problems.

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America's ability to compete in the world was also affected by its high rates of violent crime. By 1985 it had five times more homicides, ten times more rapes, and 17 times more robberies than Japan. New York City had twice as many homicides as in all of Japan. In the five years of the early 1980's, United States business had to hire 602,000 security officers just to keep people from ripping them off. This crime wave was costly both to the citizens' psyche and to the efficiency of the economy.

By 1986 Japan's taxpayers supported 50,000 inmates, including pretrial detention inmates, while the United States supported 580,000 adult prisoners. If you were to take all the prisoners in the United States in 1986 and put them in one place, it would have been a city larger than Detroit. That city had two suburbs—West Probation and East Parole—that contained another 3.7 million people. One out of 35 American males in 1986 was on probation or on parole. Such figures were hardly conducive to quality products.

The United States spent 7 percent of its gross national product on defense, whereas its international competitors spent far less. A nation with minimal defense spending can afford to concentrate its public and private capital on international competitiveness. Seventy percent of US research and development testing and evaluation programs in the 1980's went to the defense industry. About 40 percent of all their engineers and scientists were involved in military projects, while virtually all their competitor scientists and engineers were engaged in bolstering their domestic economy. The United States spent proportionally less of its economy on nonmilitary research and development, and gradually all the radios, the television sets, the video recorders, the automobiles, the textiles, the steel—virtually everything except military products—were made abroad.

By 1986, of the 17 Western industrialized democracies, the United States ranked first in military spending as a percentage of gross national product but last in productivity growth, last in manufacturing growth, and last in fixed investments as the share of gross national product. By skewing its economy toward the military and away from the domestic economy, it weakened its ability to compete internationally.

While devoting so much of its energies to military hardware, the United States neglected more vital aspects of its defense. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan observed in 1965:

> From the wild Irish slums of the 19th century Eastern seaboard to the riot torn suburbs of Los Angeles, there is one unmistakable lesson in American history: a community that allows a large number of young men (and women) to grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any set of rational expectations about the future . . . that community asks for and gets chaos.

There was a terrible breakdown in the American family. The United States had a divorce rate 25 times that of Japan. Fifty percent of all black births were illegitimate. Fifty percent of all Hispanic youth never finished high school. These numbers were a social time bomb. America soon had two jealous, angry, underutilized, undereducated, frustrated, and volatile minority groups existing unassimilated and unintegrated within its borders. Large numbers of these people were largely outside the mainstream economy and the world of jobs.

To make matters worse, the United States refused to control its borders. It persisted in the naive illusion it could accept all the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free." That was demographic insanity. By 1986 one out of ten people in Los Angeles was an illegal immigrant and 67 percent of all births in Los Angeles County hospitals were children of illegal immigrants. Large concentrations of Spanish-speaking people refusing to learn English grew up in various parts of the United States. Linguistic ghettos developed in most of the big cities. Demands for cultural parity and a bilingual, bicultural society arose, further adding incredible divisiveness to a country already rent by a myriad of social problems. By 1986 a large, underdeveloped country of some 40 million people existed within American borders.

The pressures from outside the United States were immense. In 1984, Mexico with 76 million people had 300,000 more babies than the US had with 240 million people. Massive numbers of illegal immigrants from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Latin America came to the United States.

Shortly after the year 2000, California became the United States' first Third World state. People who had their origin in Third World countries became a majority there.

A *de facto* system of apartheid developed in California, Texas, and Arizona. In California Anglos and Asians owned most of the property, had the good jobs, good education, and spoke English. The blacks and Hispanics had the poor jobs, lacked education, owned little property, spoke mostly Spanish, and were largely unassimilated. Diversity became division.

In short, the United States of America simply lost too much of its ability to work hard, to sacrifice. Like earlier civilizations, it was seduced by luxury.

> In the end, more than they wanted freedom they wanted security. They wanted a comfortable life and they lost it all—security, comfort, and freedom. When the Athenians finally wanted not to give to society, but for society to give to them; when the freedom they wished for most was the freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free.

Gibbon's description of Athens might have been a prophecy of the American decline. Perhaps it is one of the constant dilemmas of democracy.

As Henry Grunwald reminds us, we want the fullest kind of freedom in democracy. But does freedom destroy the inner disciplines that alone make freedom possible? For freedom to be workable as a political and social system, strong internal controls and a powerful moral compass are necessities. But Americans lost the work ethic, discipline, organization, and creative drive that had been responsible for their success. As Juvenal put it, "Luxury is more ruthless than war." ◈

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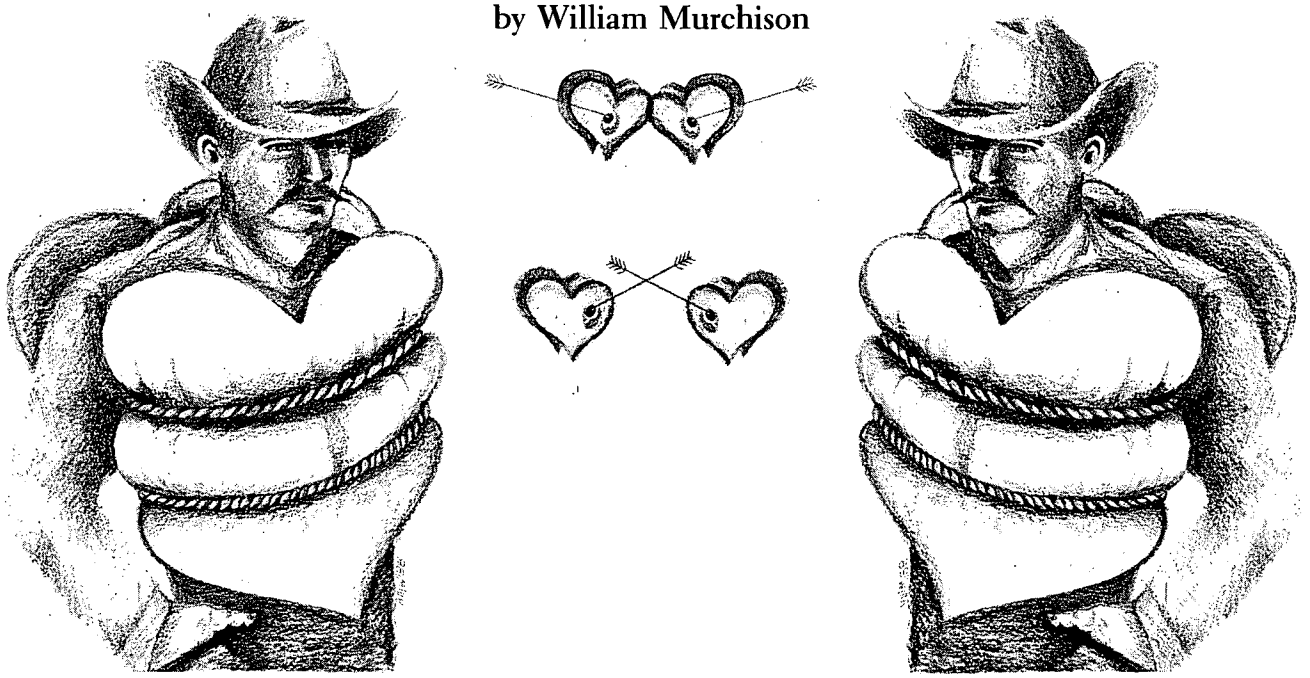
Lone Star Populism

by William Murchison



Out of thin air—or of mythic consciousness—a Texas governor once plucked unhesitatingly the *mot juste*. The governor, Allan Shivers, who served back in the 1950's, was indignant over some piece or other of legislative tomfoolery. As he saw it, the whole enterprise was downright "un-Texan."

"Un-Texan." Right there we had the nub of the matter. No deeper truth, no higher reality, needed to be fingered. The governor's listeners were to understand that two standards informed political discourse and deliberation—one for Texans and another for everybody else. The Greeks, whose word for foreigner was "barbarian," would doubtless have understood.

Texas is different, yes, when measured against the standards of Michigan, North Carolina, and South Dakota. Has any measure of uplift or social transformation ever been condemned as un-Carolinian? Un-Dakotan?

In the federal union of states, Texas is distinct all right. It may be even more distinct than the legends suggest and all the more meritorious for that—at least from a certain philosophical vantage point.

I give fair warning: we are traversing here the countryside of myth. Step carefully. The Texas myth of real men in the wide open spaces is notoriously potent, engaging—and dangerous. Dangerous because it leads to exaggeration: the blam-blam, take-that-you-varmint kind. I never cease to be amazed—yes, even in this year of grace 1989—at how many non-Texans believe our state to be populated chiefly by cattlemen and oil barons. An informal survey I have conducted reveals that we have slightly more of these types than England has monocled earls who say "pip, pip."

Mere statistical veracity is nevertheless not the point. The point is that nobody, however large his moneybags, leads Texans around by the nose or tells them what to think or how to think it. The standards, the norms, of Texas grow from the grassroots. Those roots may, and often do, yield wealth and power, but wealth and power are not permitted to overgrow the plot as a whole.

This is with the usual exceptions, carved out to accommodate human nature. Texans, like Kentuckians, Utahans, and Rhode Islanders, admire wealth; they enjoy driving big cars, shopping at Neiman-Marcus, and being photographed at fancy parties. But with admiration goes a certain skepticism about the importance of money in the great scheme of things.

The opinions of the rich do not receive automatic deference. Most Texas money, in an ever-changing economic climate, is new, or at best newish—40 or 50 years old. Joe Ed can recollect back when Jim Bob was dirt poor, and just because Jim has that fancy computer company now . . . well, you know what they say about here today, gone tomorrow. (Skepticism about wealth comes all the easier in the late 80's, what with the collapse of a speculative real estate market that propelled to power some very sharp and very flashy operators.)

Money and wealth are not the only measuring sticks, of course. There is also intellect. Intellectuals notoriously like telling other people what to think. In Texas they rarely get away with it. Here there is no aristocracy of brains any more than there is an aristocracy of cash.

This may sound more condescending than it is meant to sound. Texans are as bright and witty as people elsewhere. It merely happens they resist sitting openmouthed while others lay down the law. The law? They can figure that out for themselves. Texans need no intrusive interpreters.

The Baptists, whose creed is the noncreed of "every man his own priest," have ever flourished in Texas. According to

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William Murchison is a columnist for The Dallas Morning News.

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the 1980 census, Southern Baptists were three times more numerous than the Methodists; they outnumbered the Episcopalians, with their prayer books and bishops, 16 to 1. The gaps have no doubt widened since then.

No university of truly national stature can be found in Texas or has ever been found there. The main campus of the University of Texas, located in Austin, boasts particular departments that are first-rate; Rice University has a long tradition of excellence, particularly in science and mathematics; and Texas A&M University is ambitiously contending the yokel image of yore. But there are no Harvards in these here parts, or Stanfords; not even any Cal-Berkeleys or Michigan and Indiana U's. There are no such universities because Texans have not demanded there be.

The lack of demand frustrates Texas business leaders, who preach that a technological future requires a well-trained work force. (Note the appeal to practical, as opposed to abstractly intellectual, interests.) So far these leaders have failed to make a big impression on the public consciousness.

I do not see Texas grieving wholesale over the deficiency of world-famous centers of learning. Nor can it be all to the bad, casting a suspicious eye on intellectuals and the paraphernalia of intellectualdom. Texas has no great universities, but neither has it much susceptibility to professorial theories of angst and alienation and the duty of an intellectual caste to shepherd the lowing herd.

What do you do with people so hardheaded, so rancorous, so unwilling to be led around and preached at as Texans are? One possibility is to stare with a certain admiration, not to mention disbelief. The 21st century draws near, yet the Lone Star State clings to attitudes more generally identified with the 19th century, a time of callouses and broad vistas of opportunity. *Plus ça change*: Government, religion, learning, life in general; whatever it is, authority in Texas still rises from the bottom. Texas is as thoroughly democratic a venue as you will find in America. But that does not say it all. Democracy-from-the-ground-up proves to have consequences different from those where democracy is imposed or stimulated by the top. The people truly speak in Texas. They speak a language only dimly apprehended, at best, in places like Brookline, Massachusetts.

What do we call this language, this philosophy? Populism? Maybe so, but to do so is to run some risks. No word in the political vocabulary is more abused than "populism," unless the word is "democracy." Richard Nixon was wrong: we are not all Keynesians; in the 1980's we are all populists. Every last one of us these days is heartily for "the people." What divides us is the divergent ways in which we are for the people.

In Texas, Phil Gramm, the energetic free-marketeer who is the state's junior US senator, campaigns as a populist—one who wants to free the people from the suffocating embrace of government. A populist of a different stripe is State Treasurer Ann Richards, who won guffaws at the Democratic National Convention by ridiculing "the silver foot" in George Bush's mouth.

Richards tossed out Texanisms galore (Southernisms, really) as she swung her rolling pin at Bush. The nation learned about old dogs that won't hunt and cows that eat the cabbage, and was assured this is the way good liberal populists talk to each other. It happens that I learned all these phrases, and learned to relish them, from parents who last voted for a Democratic presidential candidate in 1936. Slinging around the patois of the people isn't the same as appreciating the views of the people, many of those views bred in the bone, inarticulately understood, and stoutly maintained against all comers.

Gramm and Richards represent, and to some degree speak authoritatively for, the two principal strains of Texas populism. Gramm's variety is the more common, the more deeply grounded in Texas history. Old-style Texas populism, as represented by Governor Jim Hogg back in the 1890's, had a small, a very small, quotient of socialistic envy and desire to punish the striped-pants set. There were radical farmers in Texas, as there were radical farmers all over the South and Midwest. Texans, nevertheless, did not cry out with one accord for the big companies to be knocked down and flayed alive for the crime of business.

Texans did not dislike "business" as such. What they disliked was big, foreign-owned (meaning New York-owned) business; business uncontrolled, uninhibited, and grasping. The Texan was by no means antibusiness; fact was, he'd always had a hankering to set up for himself, be his own man. What was the point of living in Texas, it could fairly be asked, if you failed to relish the economic opportunities Texas afforded? Why not move to Connecticut or Virginia?

Jim Hogg might inveigh against monopolistic railroads, but when the mammoth Spindletop oil field was discovered near Beaumont in 1901, he was among the first Texas entrepreneurs to jump in and develop the field. The company Hogg helped to organize is known today as Texaco.

The Texas Railroad Commission, a regulatory agency Hogg helped establish after a noisy political campaign, carefully refrained from railroad-bashing and other endeavors to diminish commerce and jobs. The commission later was given legal oversight of the oil industry Hogg had helped to found.

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Government, religion, learning, life in general; Texas is as thoroughly democratic a venue as you will find in America. The people truly speak in Texas. They speak a language only dimly apprehended, at best, in places like Brookline, Massachusetts.

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In due course the Railroad Commission became the oil industry's bosom friend and tireless promoter. Commissioners regularly journeyed to Washington to plead for tax breaks and higher prices. Whenever oversupply threatened to drive down prices, the commission lowered the monthly allowable—the amount of oil individual producers were allowed legally to produce. Until the rise of OPEC, market-demand proration in Texas kept prices firm and the industry, meaning not only bosses but workers by the

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hundreds of thousands, generally prosperous.

The Railroad Commission, both during the glory days of oil and the subsequent energy squeeze, entertained no notion of an eternal vendetta between consumers on the one hand and companies on the other. The assumption was that both groups were interested in reliable supplies at affordable prices.

Liberal populism is of another cast and variety. Its exemplar is not really Ann Richards but Jim Hightower, the tart-tongued commissioner of agriculture who is said to thirst for Phil Gramm's Senate seat. Liberal populism basically distrusts business and businessmen. It would endorse Joe Kennedy's dictum, gleefully retailed from the White House by his son John, to the effect that businessmen are SOB's.

It's true that Texas, in 1989, is not what it used to be; but then it never has been what it used to be.

The liberal populist makes a great show of loving the people. Jim Hightower wears a cowboy hat and refers to himself, in feverish moments, as "Whole Hog" Hightower. The philosophy these populists spout is hardly discernible from the collectivism preached at the loftiest level of the intellectual establishment. Business is to be tolerated, yes, but given its head? Never! Liberal populism holds that government must guide and harmonize the helter-skelter processes of the marketplace. Jim Hightower and Michael Dukakis have more in common, at the end of the day, than do Jim Hightower and Phil Gramm.

No wonder that liberal populism has never triumphed, or even scored more than marginal and temporary victories in Texas. The last liberal governor of Texas left office in 1939. He was one Jimmy Allred, and even he had his conservative side. Liberal populism is too snooty, too managerial, to win easily popular favor. It condescends to the very people it professes to love. Conservative populism understands and appreciates the orneriness of the human species; it knows that branding irons and hobbles are for horses, not citizens.

Change could be in the offing, as indeed change of some sort is always in the offing. Major Texas companies, in these austere times, are being bought out by the gross. The new owners are laying off Texans and laying on deracinated managerial types with business school degrees. I see with my own eyes resentment growing against the bottom-line mentality. But this does not yet translate into dislike of capital, only of particular capitalists. Unless businessmen as a class grow stupider than the rigors of competition generally allow them to grow, Texan hospitality to business should survive and transcend the present hard times.

It's indicative that in the 1988 election, George Bush, the probusiness candidate, carried Texas by 12 percentage points. In the centers of commerce—cities like Dallas and Houston—Bush obliterated Dukakis. The state's large and mostly flourishing middle class strongly, and not unreasonably, distrusted Dukakis's economic nostrums.

Meanwhile Texans hold tenaciously to the old belief that welfare undermines the human spirit, besides draining the state's financial resources. Texas is the stingiest—or the most sensible, depending on your viewpoint—of the 50 states in providing aid to families with dependent children. Immigrants come to Texas to work, not to go on welfare.

No values look more durable than those social and moral standards fertilized in the soil of populism. Texas, though hardly untouched by the ravages of the 20th century, may be the out-prayingest state in the union. Church attendance does not tell the whole tale. In history's most secularized era, Texas business luncheons commonly begin with the invocation of God's blessing upon our food and our purpose in coming together. As do PTA meetings, though not classes, at the public elementary school in my neighborhood.

Liberal Christianity, in Texas, sends up only the spindliest shoots—Baylor University in Waco, regarded by most non-Southern Baptists as a bastion of biblical righteousness, increasingly draws the fire of Baptists who consider its faculty too liberal. It is a matter of perspective. In Texas, "liberal" does not mean what it means in Massachusetts.

Patriotism is yet another value that deeply informs the Texas outlook, as you might expect of a people baptized in war and revolution. Protests against the Vietnam War were almost nonexistent in Texas. All the action in the 60's seemed very distant. There were no homegrown protesters of any numbers or influence, which was probably just as well. Whatever Texans missed in the way of adrenergic excitement, they gained in the way of social peace.

Texans always have been in the forefront whenever the nation called for volunteers. Theodore Roosevelt recruited the Rough Riders in San Antonio. The 36th Division, made up mainly of Texas National Guardsmen, was heroically bloodied in the Italian theater during World War II. And so on through the annals of military history. Texans fought against the United States flag from 1861-65, but made their peace in due course and today accept no backseats in the matter of national loyalty.

It's true that Texas, in 1989, is not what it used to be; but then it never has been what it used to be. A century ago, the closing of the frontier and the cessation of the Indian wars brought forth a new Texas . . . as has, in recent years, large-scale immigration by Northerners, Hispanics, and Asians; as have the decline of the family farm, the implosion of the oil and real estate booms, the rise of the Republican Party.

Cities and freeways have burgeoned. There are Texas children who go years without seeing a cow, except of course on *Sesame Street*.

Outward and visible realities pass away, yes; but inward and invisible realities exercise a tenacious hold on the people who, wherever they were born, call themselves Texans. The fierce individualism, the belief in hard work and the possibility of personal achievement, the sense of dependence on the favor of an unseen Deity—these things endure. This is not the only way obviously, but this is the Texas way—now, and, please God, a century from now.

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Recreating the Epic

by Burton Raffel

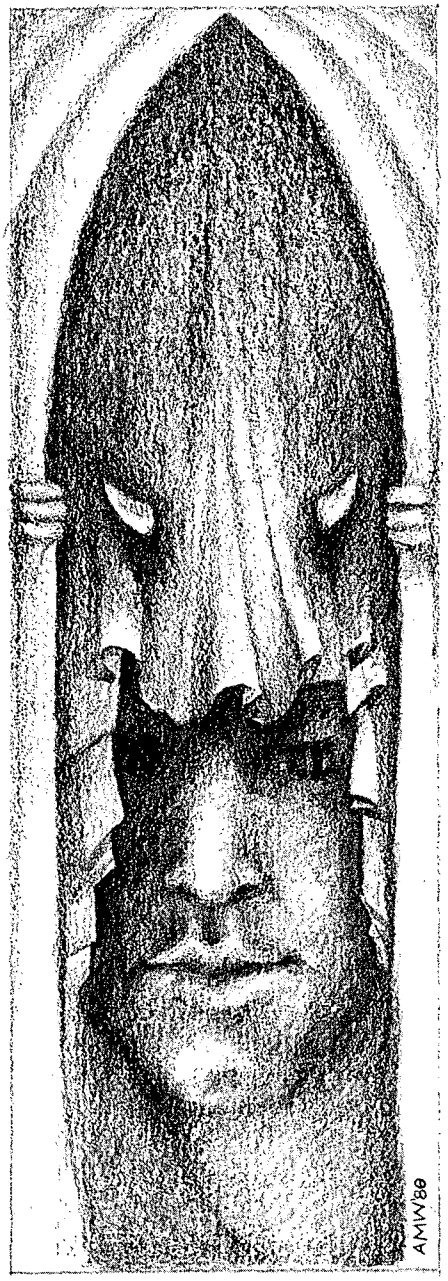
"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."
—Genesis 2.7

Genesis: An Epic Poem
by Frederick Turner
Dallas: The Saybrook Press; 303 pp., $19.95 (cloth), $9.95 (paper)

◆

The 19th century had an unfortunate passion for novels in verse. I have tried to read some of the more celebrated, notably Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (which Virginia Woolf somehow found delightful), and never made it through to the end. George Eliot's *Middlemarch* may be the best novel ever written in English, but her novel in verse, *The Spanish Gypsy*, is a soggy bore.

What Frederick Turner has now proven, with *Genesis*, is that the problem was not poetry but the poets who used it—and the way they used it. For instead of tackling epic subjects with epic approaches, as Milton and Vergil and Homer once did, Browning and Eliot tried to *reduce* poetry to narrative. That is, they seem to have taken the novel to be the true form and poetry to be, on the whole, a kind of pleasant accident, a grace note with which to decorate the holy sanctuary of prose. Browning's heroine, for instance, describes her father like this: "My father was an austere Englishman,/ Who, after a dry lifetime spent at home/ In college-learning, law, and parish talk,/ Was flooded with a passion unaware,/ His whole provisioned and complacent past/ Drowned out from him that moment."



Turner breaks this dull mold into bits. From the first moment, we hear the urgent voice of the verse storyteller, the true epic voice, which melds poetry and narrative into an inseparable, swift-moving whole:

> Listen! I must tell of the
> beginnings,
> Of corpses buried in the walls
> of worlds,
> Of how those men and women
> worth a story
> Burn and consume the powers
> they're kindled by . . .

Turner is plainly a very good poet. But so, too (though not quite so good) was Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The difference, plainly, is that Turner in no way condescends to his form: he means to write an epic because what he wants to say, and the way he wants to say it, require epic dimensions. Perhaps that is indeed the key word: "dimensions." The boundaries of *Genesis* stretch—literally—to the farthest stars. This epic contains more than multitudes, it offers us complex people of epic character, performing deeds of truly epic size. And it gives us the tale of these people in flexible, clear verse that knows how to soar, just as it knows how to modulate downward without turning flabby. In a true epic, even straightforward description must sing:

> By noon he's come into a waste
> of hills,
> Barren horizonless, smelling of
> darkish resins;

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Each summit shows a further
slope of stones,
Squat black holm-oak, rosemary
and thorns.

This simply can't be said in prose. The music of poetry, here, is as deeply wedded to the story being told as are the characters and the settings.

And those characters are fiercely real. This is not a medieval saint's tale, in which the central figure glows in the dark and can do no wrong. Everybody in this epic can and does do wrong: that is one unmistakable mark of their humanness. When Chance, the old hero, is accompanied on a supposed vacation trip by an implacable warrior, Tripitaka, he quickly realizes that the younger man is his destined assassin. He does not war with the inevitable (though when the moment comes, he fights for his life as hard as he can). Nor does the murderer-to-be, who does not want to kill this man of all others. "By the last light Chance shares the food he's brought/ With his quiet young executioner." Turner draws out the scene beautifully. "The two men wake together, look/ At each other shyly as they stretch,/ Like bride and groom on that first changed morning/ Of the honeymoon." The actual death scene seems to me perfect:

Chance is a strong man. He
attacks at once,
Gets in one blow. But
Tripitaka spins;
His left heel smashes Chance's
knee, his elbow
Crushes the ribcage, and
Chance coughs up blood.
Horribly clumsy work. The
rising sun
Strikes on the altar. Chance
struggles up, smiles,
For after all he is there in
the world
As happy as he always was;
attacks again.
Then Tripitaka breaks his neck
and throws
His body down the dewy chasm
of night.

These characters are not simply true to life; they successfully embody verities that the whole of *Genesis* seeks to both portray and activate. Chance is neither sentimental nor stupid; neither is his killer. But both live by those ancient verities, and each expects to die by them. When it is Tripitaka's turn to die, like Chance he makes no fuss:

He feels too the ancient
vigor flow
From the cold navel into thigh
and armpit.
And if his tree should not have
fruited, nor
The saintly promise of his birth
be kept,
And if his mother's sacrifice
be vain,
And if his first command be but
a feint
To draw the enemy from
greater prizes;
Yet like those breeds of peony
or peach,
Or flowering cherry or the
bitter plum,
Those beauties hybridized by
cruel arts
To be infertile while they feed
the soul,
He will now blossom into
deathly spring,
The barren glory of a
pointless end.

This is part of a battle scene—and novels have no battle scenes like it, for prose simply cannot handle what Turner is up to.

Turner has written (and published) prose fiction. He knows how that form works, and knows that it is not capable of lifting the half-mythological, half-science fiction banner he wants to float. His earlier attempts at verse epic do not entirely wrench free of prose molds: there are prosaic moments in his 1985 *The New World*. But there are magnificent moments, too, anticipating *Genesis*:

This has become a tale of
sicknesses.
Consider, though, that in the
act of increase
All creatures are most naked
to decay;
Corruption riots in the spawn
and milk
And branched tubules of
fertility.
All of these lesions of the
commonplace,
All the torn folk that die into
these lines,
Are necessary to the
immortal spasm
By which the new world will
come into being.

The ideas and even the words of science are raised to new heights in this poem. They take on a literary glow that no contemporary poet has ever achieved: in this respect too Turner's achievement is unique.

For *Genesis* is an ecological poem, a science fiction epic built on a solid scientific foundation. James Lovelock, the biologist who wrote *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, has coauthored *The Greening of Mars*, a sober, factfilled analysis, cited in Turner's prefatory remarks, of how the red planet might be brought to life. Turner takes these and other equally informed speculations and transforms them into an epic of risk-taking and adventure, of faith and betrayal, of noble visions and ignoble deeds. It has often been noted that true narrative purity, in our time, seems far easier to find in the pages of perfectly ordinary science fiction novels than in the contemporary works of literature that critics praise and students are obliged to read. The reason, plainly, is that science fiction is in fact concerned with exactly such timeless basics. Contemporary "meta-fiction" has put aside these concerns for what it thinks more important ones. But it is Frederick Turner who is right:

If I could read the pattern's
meaning, read
The light-swift scribble of Your
fractal line
Whose denser filling of Your
inexhaustible
Interstices constitutes being
in time,
I'd be among those heroes
that I sing.

A century ago, Anton Rubenstein mocked Joseph Haydn, saying that he should now be called Grandpa rather than Papa Haydn. But mere modernity is empty: Haydn strove for "truth," and lived humbly no matter how grand others may have thought him. His music remains equally timeless, while Rubenstein's has been deservedly forgotten. People will be reading, and enjoying, and profiting from *Genesis* long after the last meta-fictionist has perished from the earth. ◇

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A Prince of Our Disorder

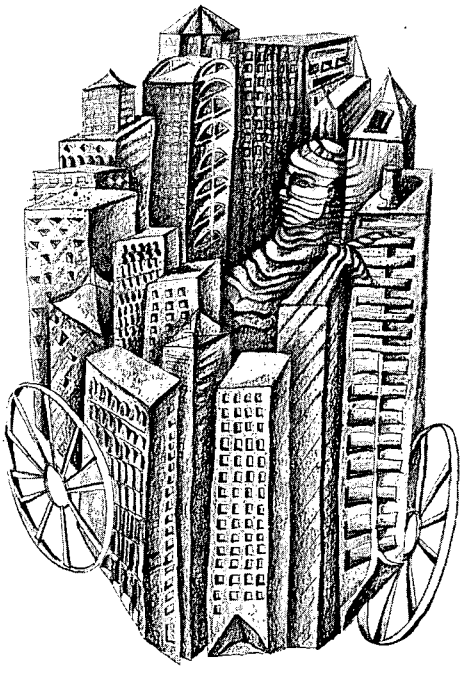
by Arthur M. Eckstein

"Very few care for beauty; but anyone can be interested in gossip."
—C.S. Lewis

The Hermit of 69th Street
by Jerzy Kosinski
New York: Seaver Books (Henry Holt & Co.); $19.95

◆

In 1982 *The Village Voice* published an article accusing the famous Polish émigré writer Jerzy Kosinski of being a fraud. The authors (Geoffrey Stokes and Eliot Fremont-Smith) argued that Kosinski's novels had all received extensive and unacknowledged "help" from various editorial assistants; that Kosinski's most famous novel, *The Painted Bird* (1965), had probably been published under false pretenses, at a time when Kosinski could not even write English; and that Kosinski's earliest books, hostile nonfiction accounts of life in the Soviet Union, had perhaps been written for him by agents of the CIA. The thesis of Stokes and Fremont-Smith was that once *The Painted Bird* became a big literary success, Kosinski became permanently "trapped" in the public persona of a writer—and a writer in English, to boot—and that he was thereafter forced to publish more novels (with necessary professional help) in order to maintain the basically fraudulent image he had acquired. It is not clear why this story should ever have received any credence. Though the article was termed "meticulously researched" (if fundamentally misguided) by *The Washington Post* as late as this year, it was, in fact, based on the word of witnesses who suddenly reneged on crucial testimony, or later angrily claimed to have been misquoted or misinterpreted, and on rumors planted in the US by the Polish secret police (as *The New York Times* has shown) as far back as the 1960's. Moreover, the very idea that someone would feel so "trapped" in the public persona of a writer as then to go on to write *seven* more novels was improbable on its face. This is especially true considering the severe risks of *exposure* Kosinski would have faced each and every time he published, if he were actually using the fraudulent method of composition (via "assistants") which *The Village Voice* claimed.



The *Village Voice* scandal was just one of those bizarre occurrences that have marked Jerzy Kosinski's life. Sometimes his luck has been good: he missed being murdered by the Manson Gang at Sharon Tate's house in 1969 because his luggage got lost on the plane from Paris to New York; and as a child, of course, he missed being murdered by the Nazis. But sometimes his luck has been bad, as in the sudden death (by stroke) of his beloved first wife, Mary Weir—or here, with *The Village Voice*. No wonder that in *Being There* (1970) he named one of his heroes "Chance"! Nevertheless, the *Village Voice* scandal damaged Kosinski's reputation, at least momentarily. No matter how unfair the original article, how flimsy its evidence, or how transparently political the motives of the authors (who clearly believed that only CIA stooges could want to write books attacking communism), it was impossible for Kosinski completely to defend himself.

The Hermit of 69th Street is, in more ways than one, Kosinski's revenge. The new novel is massive, brilliant, often bitter. The last half centers on a fictionalized version of the scandal and its impact. The stand-ins for Stokes and Fremont-Smith are, naturally, treated in an entertainingly savage way: as smug Stalinoid-Nazi literary goons. And the notorious "editorial assistants" are transformed into representatives of a high-priced call-girl service—whose performances with Kosinski's hero, the hapless and basically innocent writer "Kosky," give him little satisfaction indeed. Conversely, Kosinski evolves a hilarious (but frighteningly self-punitive) fantasy in which Kosky, because of the scandal, fails to sell even a *single* copy of his new novel anywhere in the world—and loses his beautiful New York apartment as well.

But that is the book only at one level, the level of the plot. Kosinski has taken on *The Village Voice* and its accusations about his inability to write English by filling every page of *The Hermit of 69th Street* with multiple puns, assonance, onomatopoeia—linguistic fireworks of all sorts. Kosinski was always a stylist: avant-garde, plain, baroque, romantic, depending on his mood. But here he reveals himself as a true—even arrogant—master of sophisticated and elegant English expression.

And there is yet another level on which Kosinski satirizes the charges concerning his authorial originality: he throws in every possible source for

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"Kosky's" ideas in continuous running footnotes at the bottom of every page, combining these with boldface quotations (from every imaginable personage from Heinrich Himmler to Mae West) interspersed right in the main text. The result is, simply, a brand new novelistic form: utterly original, and often fascinating (but sometimes — as in the lengthy disquisitions on Tantric Yoga philosophy of which "Kosky" is fond — interminable and irritating). Kosinski calls this new novelistic form "autofiction." It insistently interrupts the reader's normal immersion in the narrative, i.e., the willing acceptance of the-novel-as-reality, and forces the reader constantly to be aware that he is reading someone's artificially designed text. Deconstructionists should love it.

Kosinski's experiments with prose format, however, may in the long run not be as important as the new emotional openness which characterizes *The Hermit*. Since the grotesque and violent *Steps* (1968) — for which, given the mood of the times, he won a National Book Award — Kosinski's novels have tended to become ever less surreal in tone, less bizarre, less totally nihilistic. Thus *Pinball* (1981) — his last major work before *The Hermit* — is the most approachable and optimistic of all Kosinski's books. It even has a relatively happy ending. The comic pessimism of *The Hermit* therefore represents something of a return to an earlier Kosinski; and yet what is striking is that here, for the first time since *The Painted Bird*, Kosinski also tries once more to confront directly the major trauma of his life: the Holocaust. And in doing so, he establishes two new and direct claims to personal identity, in areas where he has previously been evasive. He is now willing to say openly and repeatedly that he is a Jew, and that he is a Pole.

It was only because Polish peasants hid him from the Nazis that the child Kosinski survived in 1939-1945 (his family did not). Not surprisingly, the theme of "concealment" — hiding, masks — has been a dominant one in his life: "Kosinski" itself is in fact only an assumed name. Moreover, after the publication of *The Painted Bird*, Kosinski sometimes emitted ambiguous signals concerning his own Jewishness; and though most of his fictional heroes over the past 20 years have been Eastern Europeans, none has been recognizably a Jew. *The Hermit*, however, has in "Kosky" a sympathetic Jewish protagonist who often meditates on the Holocaust; moreover, Kosinski writes at length and with compassion concerning Chaim Rumkowski, the Jewish "ruler" of the Lodz Ghetto, who faced the terrible choice between immediate and complete annihilation of his people, or the slim possibility that some might survive via his (and their) cooperation with their Nazi oppressors. He retells once more some of his own adventures as a terrified child fleeing from the murderers. And the Nazi symbol "SS" appears on just about every page (although Kosinski gives "SS" kaleidoscopically-changing secondary meanings: for instance, "Safe Sex"!). But Kosinski would also agree with Jacob Neusner that the central meaning of the Jewish experience must be Mt. Sinai, not Auschwitz. And so we get (in the indispensable footnotes) a large dose of Talmud, and Hasidic religious philosophy as well, enriching the entire book. (None of this material has ever appeared in Kosinski's novels before, and his ease with it comes as a shock.) It is no accident that just this winter Kosinski visited Israel for the first time.

But beyond this, Kosinski has also, in *The Hermit*, come to terms with being a specific part of the *Polish* community. The Communist government in Poland for 20 years savagely attacked *The Painted Bird* for being "anti-Polish," because it depicted the crudity and brutality of Polish peasant life during the war. This charge was always unfair: peasants often are crude, and life in the countryside during a war is often brutal. But now in *The Hermit*, Kosinski goes out of his way to emphasize a fact probably little-known to most of his readers: the terrible suffering of the *non*-Jewish population of Poland under Nazi rule. It was not as terrible as the suffering of the Jews, but it was terrible enough. Kosinski emphasizes that literally millions of Poles were murdered by the Nazis, and further millions enslaved: perhaps a third of the entire people. Similarly, with this emphasis on a community of suffering, Kosinski emphasizes his impression that prewar Polish-Jewish relations were relatively good, and that Poles and Jews were in the process of creating together a great national literature. Finally, he emphasizes that he himself is alive only because dozens of Poles risked their lives to protect a Jewish child.

Here Kosinski makes an important contribution to the debate currently raging in Poland over national behavior before and during the Holocaust. This debate was initiated by the great Solidarity independent trade union (for which Kosinski was an important international spokesman), and was pushed further forward by the film *Shoah*. Kosinski's position seems to be that one should be amazed and thankful that *any* moral behavior occurred in Poland in 1939-1945, given the situation created by the Nazis (with a little help, of course, from the USSR): as he is sympathetic toward Chaim Rumkowski's predicament, so he is sympathetic toward the Poles. In fact, Kosinski is currently chairman of the American Foundation for Polish-Jewish Studies. And this spring, after 32 years of enforced exile, he was suddenly invited to make an official visit to Poland, to read (in English!) from his novels. Such, of course, is the momentary effect of *glasnost*.

Thus from being a man without a country in 1956, Jerzy Kosinski now seems on the verge of becoming a man with three of them (Israel, Poland, and the United States). *The Hermit of 69th Street* is therefore more than a novel of comic revenge against the *Voice* (though, to be sure, it is that as well). Massive and complex, the book is not for everyone; but it marks an important way-station along Kosinski's road of development, and deals insightfully with the entire question of self-identity. Does this mean, however, that in *The Hermit of 69th Street* we are finally getting a glimpse of "the real Jerzy Kosinski"? Probably not. We can still be glad that we've been invited along for the ride. ◇

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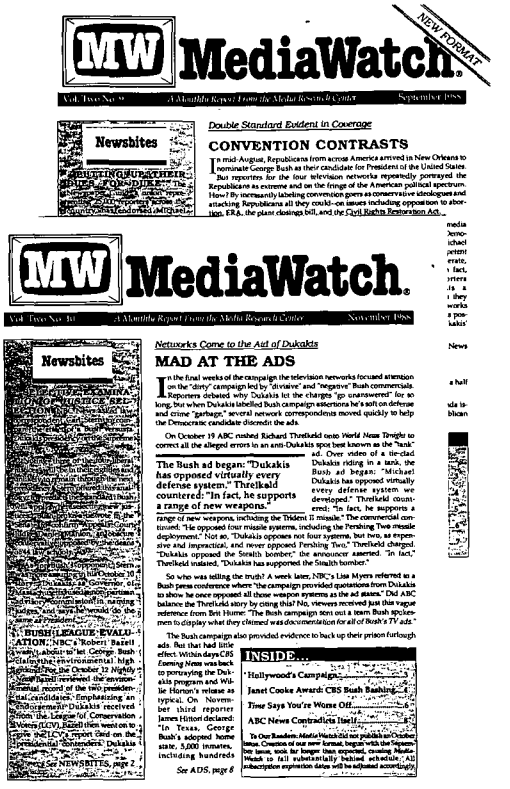
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The City of Man — Texas Style

by Carl C. Curtis

Indianola: The Mother of Western Texas
by Brownson Malsch
Austin: State House Press;
351 pp., $19.95

◆

We all know something of cities that thrived once and then for one reason or another ceased to exist — preclassical cities we read about in myth and epic; Homer's Troy or St. Paul's Ephesus. So used are we to thinking of these extinct places as ancient and, therefore, remote, that it is hard to conceive, as Macaulay once did, of the cities we know and live in being ruins, or worse, grassy mounds in empty fields.

There can be little doubting that most of us tend to take our world for granted. This tendency was certainly evident in the lives of men and women of Indianola, Texas, in the middle 19th century. Like us, they were too busy with too many things to even begin to consider the eventual, much less the imminent, disappearance of their city. To the contrary, the 19th-century faith in progress led them to hold expectations of infinite growth and prosperity. And in many ways they had good reason.

Indianola, originally called Indian Point, began in 1844 as little more than a landing spot for ships of German immigrants. Under the auspices of the Adelsverein of Biebrich am Rhein, the immigrants landed in Texas with the intention of traveling inland to central (or, as that region was then called, western) Texas settlements that in time would become New Braunfels and Fredericksburg. Disease and difficulties in traveling overland persuaded a number of the Germans to remain at Indian Point and scratch out a living as best they could.

Much to their surprise, what the German and, later, American settlers discovered was that the place they had chosen out of necessity for their refuge was an excellent location for a port. Its waters, though not quite as deep as Galveston's, were of a good depth; better, in fact, than almost any other place on the Texas gulf coast. Within a period of 15 years, the small settlement, which renamed itself Indianola, became a prosperous port, smaller than Galveston (then the largest city in Texas) but large enough to pose a serious threat to the bigger city's interests.

Charles Morgan, the New York shipping magnate, slowly shifted the bulk of his business from other Texas ports to Indianola. His vision, shared by most Indianolans, was to make the city the gateway of commerce to the New Mexico and California territories acquired in the aftermath of the Mexican War. It was not such a wild dream. The distance from Indianola to Santa Fe, El Paso, and Chihuahua was much shorter than the route from Independence, Missouri, then in use. As the city grew in importance, the addition of a railroad seemed all that was needed to insure the prosperity of the city into the 20th century.

Then suddenly it all ended. In 1875 what we might now call "the hurricane of the century" made landfall at Indianola with winds estimated at 150 miles per hour. Located barely above sea level, the city did not stand a chance. At least 300 of the town's population of 3,000 died — mostly by drowning. Ninety percent of the buildings (including the gulfside warehouses of numerous tradesmen) disappeared — as complete a picture of devastation as the men and women of that day could imagine. It was the first hurricane to strike a populated region in Texas.

In the aftermath of the storm, efforts were made to move the town three miles inland along Powder Horn Lake (actually a bayou connected to the Gulf of Mexico by a narrow strait). The town fathers proposed some minimal dredging to open the lake to shipping in hopes that the town could recover. The new site might well have protected the town from the ravages of future hurricanes. But one of Morgan's lieutenants vetoed the action, threatening to cut ties with Indianola should the move take place, an act that would have destroyed the town commercially as certainly as any hurricane.

As a consequence, the newly rebuilt Indianola stayed in its original place, somewhat smaller than before in both population and physical size, and just as vulnerable to hurricanes. When the next "hurricane of the century" hit the gulf coast a mere 11 years later, against all odds it again made landfall at Indianola. The results were similar to the first. Within days following the second disaster, a special election was called to address the question of moving the county seat from Indianola to Port Lavaca. The proposition passed, and most of the people moved away — to Cuero, Victoria, or San Antonio. The handful that remained would face one more disappointment. Two years later, a fire destroyed the few buildings left in the business district. After that, the post office was moved out, and the town was officially declared dead.

Brownson Malsch's history of Indianola is not exactly Gibbon. For one thing, it lacks clear focus. Chapters that state one topic as their theme have a bad habit of rambling over half a dozen others. (My favorite is one entitled "The Government Depot," in which the author treats not only that subject, but music, the rivalry with Port Lavaca, a yellow fever epidemic, and the local bawdy houses — all in the space of nine pages.) This scattergun approach has its virtues: the book is loaded with facts of all kinds. No one can say Malsch doesn't know Indianola. But the reader who leaves the book scratching his head can certainly be excused.

In spite of this hailstorm of rather disconnected facts, a picture of life, not only in Indianola but in 19th-century Texas, does emerge. It was a world in which a fever-infested wasteland became a town of saloons and ginger-beer gardens, gas-lighted homes and streets, and churches of all denominations filled with people who worked hard and hated high taxes. They respected the Yankee soldiers who occupied their town during Reconstruction almost as much as they

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hated the politicians who sent them there, marveled at advances in modern technology, such as steamship refrigeration that, as an editorial in the New Orleans *Picayune* put it, yielded "cattle turned into gold," and looked forward to a future of limitless prosperity and wealth. All in all, they were rather like us: living, eating, drinking, and marrying, even on the day that God sent the winds that reminded them their city was not eternal.

Carl C. Curtis lives in east Texas.

Intellectual Operator

by Thomas Molnar

Politics, Philosophy, Culture—Interviews and Other Writings
by Michel Foucault, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman
New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall; 330 pp., $25.00

◆

It is a distinct possibility that we leave to posterity writers and works from which the future curious will conclude that this century was the stupidest, most verbose and obscene, altogether the worst in the historical record. What else can you say of a century that elected Michel Foucault as one of its *maîtres à penser*, together with an assortment of Sartrian and Marcusian monsters, structuralists, deconstructionists, decoders, and other homosexuals? Homosexuality occupies about half of this volume (with incest too getting some attention as, of course, a morally neutral practice). The rest is taken up with questions and answers (almost all 330 pages are interviews and debates), most of it exasperating trivialities wrapped in jargon.

With a kind of coquettishness Foucault denies he is a structuralist, though his analyses belie him. On the other hand, he does not deny that he is a homosexual, and delves into that matter with a stomach-turning psycho-socio-philosophical seriousness. But even when he wears the mask of a professor at the Collège de France, his style, approach, and analyses are those of a purely (structurally?) subversive mind for which "structuralism" is a mere pretext. Were he an idealist with Plato, a logician with Aristotle, an orator with Demosthenes, his manner of arguing would still create the impression of an intellectual operator.

Structuralism for such a man is merely the most convenient tool with which to deconstruct and fraudulently decode every human achievement. It is with a certain taste for the morbid that he focuses on such questions as, why does "what we call literature" occupy a privileged position, why not just any assemblage of words? (Shall we propose a train schedule?) Or, why is folly (or pederasty) not regarded as merely a part of things as they are—why is society preoccupied with it as something negative? Playing this game, Foucault is by no means pursuing the Socratic objective of revealing essences and their ultimate substratum; Foucault regards words, concepts, explanations, and judgments, or simply just *nouns*, as springboards toward verbal dissolution. It is Nietzsche, without the genius.

The overall purpose, if any, is to demonstrate that man is merely an artificial focus (any other would do) put together for no reason, but dissolvable in structure: the structure of grammar, of the prevailing sexual code, or of intratribal relationships. The reader feels he is caught in some kind of enigma and wants to find out what are the last motives of his being and actions, beyond what the other masters of suspicion propose: Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, Sartre. Or is he, our inquiring man, merely his language habits, cooking methods, wedding ceremonial, sexuality, kinship within the clan? Levi-Strauss is at least honest. He concluded long ago that man is nothing but the temporary *locus* of interacting structures. Foucault has simply no conclusions to offer. He modestly invites unsuspecting students and aberrant intellectuals to endless talkfests where anything may be said—or nothing. He relates to one interviewer that he experienced happiness twice in life: once when he casually met for the first time a German film producer, took him home, "smoked some hash," and both remained silent for ten hours; the second time when he was hit by a car, was not hurt badly, and burst into laughter. (One wonders if the third time he knew happiness was when he was dying from AIDS.)

How much philosophical credit does one give a man whose happiness takes such morbid forms, who speaks about it as "events," then goes to class and teaches? Is this a late residue of Marxism (no, he was never a Communist), which teaches that man is his class-consciousness; or is it something beyond Marxism when only destructiveness remains, and only as a gratuitous exercise? If we carry Foucaultism to its logical consequence, Foucault himself evaporates in some final structure of all structures. Put otherwise, can we have a real face, if all we see of ourselves are endless mirror images of what we thought was our face? We can, of course, count them and explore the technique of mirror reflection; but we can also declare, resigned, that indeed we never had a face.

The system of which Foucault is a prominent proponent holds, together with much of modern speculation, that man is not the *subject* of his beliefs, thoughts, judgments, opinions, and actions, he is their *object*. Structures act on him, or rather act him (pardon the grammar); he is their random meeting point. But both the meeting point and the converging structures could be something else, in which case the already fragile, vaporous self would not be. Astrophysicists have accepted the hypothesis that nothing in the universe *is* (certainly not the way it is observed and visualized) and that mathematical formulas make sense only in the light of other mathematical formulas. Why not assume that Foucault's ambition is a similarly evanescent equation? His structuralist colleague (incidentally, both deny that they are structuralists) Levi-Strauss has admitted that much. The objective is to reduce man to interlocking formulas, to objects of endlessly explorable and shifting non-meanings—until such time, says Levi-Strauss, that one can prove that nothing exists besides chemical, then subatomic, agitation. If long stretches of hashish-induced stupor and car accidents can cause happiness, why would meaninglessness not be the supreme beatitude?

Yet there can be no beatitude, not even happiness, only transient sensations of good feeling while smoking

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hash. Suppose we declare that keeping history's record, including the present volume, is also an arbitrarily chosen structure; why should one then remember what Michel Foucault said, lectured, or wrote in the meaningless succession of ticked-off zero times?

Thomas Molnar is the author of The Pagan Temptation.

A Literary Proctology

by Tommy W. Rogers

With All My Might
by Erskine Caldwell
Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, Ltd.
382 pp., $19.95

◆

"My goal from the beginning," states Caldwell, "was to be a writer of fiction that revealed . . . the inner spirit of men and women as they responded to the joys of life and reacted to the sorrows of existence." The conclusion, however, of what he sought to achieve "with all my might" is an unwillingness to "relive my life for the purpose of rectifying the mistakes and attempt to correct the errors I have made along the way."

What Caldwell did along the way was to become generally recognized by the mid-1960's as the best-selling author of all time. Novelist, photojournalist, foreign correspondent, screenwriter, writer of short stories and children's books, Caldwell authored over 50 books. His efforts made him wealthy and notorious. His indictment of socio-economic conditions in America earned him the hatred of anticommunists. Westbrook Pegler, on the other hand, credited Caldwell with earning 22 citations by the House Un-American Activities Committee—even more than Margaret Bourke-White, one of the four wives Caldwell accumulated along the way.

Caldwell's early life was spent primarily in backwater communities in the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Georgia. Raised to think independently and never required to attend church, he developed contempt for the religious enthusiasm that flourished among his neighbors "with all the unbounded vigor of an untrampled kudzu vine." Caldwell entered a public school for the first time as a seventh grader in Atoka, Tennessee.

A year and a half later (1918) the Caldwells moved to Wrens, Georgia. An adolescent entrepreneur, Caldwell became a blueing salesman, *Grit* distributor, shoe delivery boy, scrap rubber salesman, rabbit trapper-hide salesman, and chauffeur for the Millington, Tennessee YMCA. "Prone to be far more interested in the activities of people in daily life than . . . the slow and tedious prospect of acquiring a textbook education," Caldwell further busied himself as a printer's devil, scorekeeper for the semipro baseball team, stringer for the *Augusta Chronicle*, and driver for a village physician.

From Wrens, Caldwell went to Erskine College in Due West, South Carolina. Unable to stomach the forced piety, Caldwell spent much of his time on freight trains, traveling. Bolstered by an "invigorating feeling of relief to know that I was finally escaping from a fanatic connection that might have made a subdued captive of me to the end of my days," he summarily escaped Erskine in his second year by taking a passenger train to New Orleans. Short-lived jobs as a deck hand, racetrack stable boy, and magazine salesman finally earned him some jail time for vagrancy in Bogalusa, Louisiana. He may well have spent his life there, except for a letter home. When Caldwell arrived back, his father, with no hint of recrimination, "came up to me and smiled and shook hands without a trace of displeasure . . . I can recall only one thing that was said as we walked along . . . 'What did you think of Louisiana, son . . . It's a much different kind of world, isn't it?'"

Benefiting from a United Daughters of the Confederacy scholarship, Caldwell went to the University of Virginia that fall. There he developed an interest in English, economics, and sociology, as the "basic elements necessary for the achievement of reality in interpretive and imaginative storytelling." Two years later he was off to Philadelphia for the summer session as a student at the Wharton School and to work as a night-shift counterman at a fast-food cubbyhole, and bodyguard for a Chinese student.

Returning to Virginia for the spring semester, Caldwell met Helen Lannigan, a graduate student. In March 1925, they were married. When his UDC scholarship and dollar-a-night job as a poolroom attendant proved insufficient, Caldwell boarded an Atlanta-bound train, leaving "behind forever my car and my university." After holding a $20-a-week job as a reporter on the *Atlanta Journal*, Erskine Caldwell went to live rent-free in a Maine woods house owned by Helen's parents. Here, ably assisted by Helen, he set himself to become a selling writer.

His first books attracted little attention. Then came *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God's Little Acre* (1933). *Tobacco Road* portrayed Georgia dirt farmers like Jeeter Lester, to whom "the smell of that raw earth turning over behind the plow" was in the blood. As an exposé of mental and moral anemia among people of scant hope, "who ignore the civilization that contains them as completely as the civilization ignores them," (as *The Nation* put it), *Tobacco Road* created an uproar that made Caldwell simultaneously famous and infamous, allowing him to live in luxury in midtown New York. Poverty, Helen, and the Maine woods were soon left behind.

By the late 1930's, Broadway and touring company productions of *Tobacco Road* were drawing the attention of censors in city after city and were bringing Caldwell thousands of dollars weekly. With its publication in paperback (1946) and the sales of his other books, Caldwell was on the way to becoming "America's best-selling author."

God's Little Acre was evaluated by a contemporary reviewer for the *Chicago Daily* as "an off-color story skillfully combined with an enlarged comic strip." He added that what Faulkner implied, Caldwell recorded—the barren farm, the shut mill, the brutal imagery of poor whites ensconced in ignorance and sordid surroundings. By the early 1960's *God's Little Acre* had exceeded the sales of *Gone With the Wind* by over a million copies. Along with *Tobacco Road*, it continues to be Caldwell's primary claim to literary fame.

Caldwell was anything but a proponent of a pastoral, conservative, reli-

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gious South. He had seen enough abominable living conditions and desperation to be obsequious to the South's agricultural satraps. And he had no underlying philosophic ideal to anchor his observations within an Agrarian renascence. Viewing the world as a mine for his short stories and novels, he described the landless, ill, poverty-stricken Southerners of the bare hovels on Tobacco Road as

> pathetic people, most of them being illiterate and in ill-health for the length of their days, who existed in timeless agony without hope on earth but clinging to the belief that their pains and hunger would miraculously disappear when they were born again as so glibly promised by every passing evangelist. Their tragic lot was to have come into the world before the conscience of their fellow men rose to provide assistance and welfare for the unfortunate. I often recalled my father's way of expressing compassion for their predicament when he would say "those people are as God-forsaken as a toad in a post hole."

Caldwell's characterizations, as he puts it in *With All My Might*, "were not imitations of life but interpretations . . . more real than life itself in order for it to be believable . . . True realism, then, was not the reality of life but a forceful illusion of it." Having no desire to change the world, Caldwell says, "nevertheless I was motivated by the urge to write about the economic and social plight of the disadvantaged in such a way that readers would be moved to react with sympathy and eventual assistance for creatures of a subhuman world."

Some of the Southerners who saw in the Southern ethos and Agrarian social organization a hope for a future more in alignment with the Jeffersonian than the Leviathan state thought Caldwell's portraits of Southern rural life "shone and stank like a dead mackerel in the moonlight." To John Donald Wade, such fiction was a mass-produced commodity, whose ribald characters were developed more for commercial utility than social criticism. To Donald Davidson, such mercenary pandering was circumscribed by the evaluation that "Sweet Are the Uses of Degeneracy." However, in Caldwell's view, to whatever extent the American Dream held substance beyond snuff and religion, it fell short for the masses of the Southern underclass.

Trouble in July (1940), *Georgia Boy* (1943), *A House in the Uplands* (1946), *The Sure Hand of God* (1947), and *This Very Earth* (1948), bolstered by paperback sales, each sold over a million copies. By the end of the 1940's Caldwell's laurels included designation by *Publishers Weekly* as "America's most censored author." *A Lamp for Nightfall*, written between *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre* but not published until 1952, was intended to accomplish for the rural Northeast what *Tobacco Road* had done for Georgia. It was regarded by critics as a compilation of grotesque incidents and transparent sex and violence. Warren Beck characterized *Claudelle English* (1959) as a superficial repackaging of earlier themes and utterly "without sociological or psychological depth." *Certain Women* (1957) was so replete with crude plots and caricatures of allegedly Southern heroines that one reviewer wondered why only the South must suffer their presence. J.C. Pine, reviewing *Miss Mama Aimee* (1967), opined that Caldwell's novels consistently showed an ambivalent tendency toward both low comedy and high tragedy, adding that, in the absence of either, Caldwell settled for nothing.

Scott McDonald, writing in *Dictionary of American Biography* (1981), evaluates Caldwell's impact on American letters as being as powerful as Hemingway's. Even so, the question may be raised whether Caldwell is a regional writer dealing with explicitly Southern themes, or whether his writing merely happened to have a Southern setting. According to the *Southern Literary Culture* bibliography, Caldwell has been the subject of eight master's theses and four doctoral dissertations. While William Faulkner and his characters, plot, presentation, and location fill academic journals, neither Caldwell nor his work are subjects for academic career specialization.

Robert Hazel, commenting in *Southern Renascence* (1953), highlighted the contrast between Faulkner and Caldwell. Caldwell created a world of forces reflecting "an immediate sociological [sic] concern" in narrative advanced by the plain speech of its characters, rather than by the poetic resonance of good prose that is indispensable to what is identified as Southern literature. Caldwell, Hazel concludes, though not a Southern writer in the sense of Faulkner or Thomas Wolfe, may nevertheless be credited with reportage from "a country not [otherwise] heard from."

With All My Might may tell readers more about Caldwell than they care to know, at least in terms of his discovery of the "irresistible lure of the female sex." Avoiding the mantras of the Christian religion like a plague, and wholly free of any fundamentalist septicemia, Caldwell lived fast, but long. Fortunately, the focus in *With All My Might* on the adult Caldwell is on him as a writer. With his talent and proclivities, it is perhaps fortunate that Caldwell was an agnostic. I shudder to think what he may have accomplished had he gone to Bible school, or decided to carve out a career in religious charlatanry.

Tommy W. Rogers lives in Jackson, Mississippi.

Violence and the Subversive

by E. Christian Kopff

The Dynamics of Subversion and Violence in Contemporary Italy
by Vittorfranco S. Pisano
Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press; $18.95

◆

Terrorism has been a plague for Western democracies over the past decade, but in France and Britain it has not been a fatal disease. Other countries have not been so lucky. The Tupamaros of Uruguay took a country that, with all its problems of inflation and corruption, enjoyed 90 percent literacy, low infant mortality, and the oldest social security system outside of Sweden and in two years, from 1970-72, drove the Nation-

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al Assembly to hand over the state to a brutal but effective military dictatorship. (The Tupamaros' first triumph was the murder of US advisor Dan Mitrione, an act glorified in Costa-Gavras's movie *State of Siege*.)

In the 1970's many people believed that the Red Brigades and their extra-parliamentary allies were going to have the same success in Italy. Vittorfranco Pisano surveys the carnage wrought in Italy from 1969 to 1986 in a clearly organized and detailed book which is supplemented by appendices outlining the major terrorist acts, grouped to clarify their social and political intent. This is an excellent textbook for anyone studying one of the most impressive attempts in recent history to overthrow a democracy. Pisano never makes it clear to me, however, why the Red Brigades did not succeed. With all his accuracy and clarity of presentation, a picture of the dynamics of Italian terrorism as promised in the title is precisely what I find lacking in his account.

One significant factor was the attitude of educated Italians. Even the most intelligent bought bizarre leftist tracts and boasted in their cups, "I'm not just a Communist; I'm a Stalinist." The fascist origin of all political violence in Italy is certain, but Pisano points out that all the trials, appellate proceedings, and retrials of the past 20 years have not established the fascist origin of the worst atrocities attributed to the right, including the bank explosion of 1969 in Milan's Piazza Fontana (16 dead), and the bombing of the Bologna train station in 1980 (85 dead).

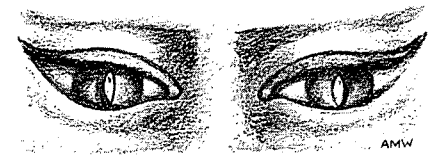
That Italy was on the verge of a right-wing coup was the *communis opinio* in the early 70's. When millionaire Giangi Feltrinelli blew himself up with one of his own bombs in March of 1972, it was all but universally believed that he was killed by fascists (or the CIA) as an act of provocation. Not until the Red Brigade leaders proclaimed his glorious death in open trial did the intelligentsia concede that Feltrinelli had been financing the wildest and most violent leftist schemes.

Absurd and tragic tales abound. Leftists set fire to the apartment of a right-wing labor leader in Primavalle in Rome in 1973. His children were home, and one did not escape. The Rome papers were full of horrific pictures of the small child at a window, screaming helplessly. The next day the popular Communist daily *Paese Sera* proclaimed that the atrocity had been committed by the right as an act of provocation, and this became the accepted belief of the *bien pensants*. The perpetrators of the crime fled to Sweden. The Italian novelist Alberto Moravia sent a telegram to the Swedish authorities, urging them to ignore the Italian extradition request, because the suspects were "unjustly accused." The mills of Italian justice grind slowly, and it was just this past year that the court handed down its final decision. There is no reasonable doubt that the two leftists were guilty, nor any serious evidence for "provocation."

The atmosphere in which otherwise rational people could believe that right-wingers burn their own children alive to provoke military coups — in Italy of all countries! — was the background for the rise of the Red Brigades and their allies. Italian intellectuals and the Italian press continued to support them actively, or at least turned a deaf ear to overwhelming proof of leftist violence intended to destroy the Italian democracy.

Those who spoke out suffered the consequences. When world-renowned author Luigi Barzini told the truth about his stepson, Giangi Feltrinelli, he was reviled, and an attempt to make him editor of the Rome newspaper *Messagero* was blocked. Indro Montanelli is Italy's most popular author, a combination of Bill Buckley and Will Durant. He walked out of Italy's most prestigious newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, because of leftist cover-ups, and founded his own, *Il Giornale Nuovo*. For much of the 70's, to be seen reading it was to be thought some kind of a nut.

Italian public opinion did change, however. Part of it was the continuing series of murders and knee-cappings, ranging from labor leaders to Montanelli himself. Then in 1978 came the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro, president of the largest Italian party, the Christian Democrats. The Red Brigadists began to talk, partly in defiance, more as *pentiti*, the penitents. Why this happened is not clear. My own memories of 1979 have many more of the terrorists fighting to the death than had happened earlier. It was my deduction not that the Red Brigades' policy had changed, but that the police had decided or were under orders to stop taking so many prisoners. Whatever the reason, by late 1979 the first of the major *pentiti* had started talking.



That was not the end, of course. The attempted assassination of the Pope in 1981, and the massacre in the Rome airport of December 1985, show that the terrorist left is still alive and kicking. Things have improved, however. Fewer people died in 1986 as a result of political violence in Italy than in any year since 1968. There are many reasons, including the growing firmness of the Italian government. Bettino Craxi has led the Italian Socialist Party away from its long dalliance with the Communists, providing the basis for a democratic left. There is no simple picture, however. Craxi was responsible for allowing the planner of the *Achille Lauro* atrocity to escape. The decision brought down his government, and his reward was the Rome airport massacre. There are still many unanswered questions. Pisano provides fascinating evidence that Aldo Moro may have been held in the Czech embassy in Rome. The first journalist to formulate a Czech connection in the Moro case was murdered in 1979 under circumstances that have not yet been explained.

The rats of international terrorism are still hiding in the walls, biding their time, ready to emerge again at any sign of weakness. This Jacques Chirac discovered in the fall of 1986. There is no excuse for any constitutional government to go the way of Uruguay. The Italian political class has much to learn, and the knee-capping of Indro Montanelli and the murder of Aldo Moro were only two lessons out of hundreds. They are learning, however, a lesson that neither they nor we can afford to forget.

E. Christian Kopff is professor of classics at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

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Piping Hot

by Thomas McGonigle

Hot Type
edited by John Miller, Heidi Benson, Cynthia Koral, and Randall Koral
New York: Collier Books;
235 pp., $7.95

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Concocted by four editors of something called *Equator* magazine (I am told it is a large glossy tabloid of odd people doing odd things), *Hot Type*'s subtitle is: "Our Most Celebrated Writers Introduce the Next Word in Contemporary American Fiction." On the basis of the writing selected, I don't know if I would let some of "our most celebrated writers" into the house without locking up the silver and providing a chastity belt for the cat.

Maybe, at one time, such an anthology—though not assisted by so many cooks—might have been a good idea. It would be interesting to see whom, for instance, James Joyce or Marcel Proust would have championed, or whom Faulkner, Fitzgerald, or Hemingway would have seen fit to hype and blurb. But not any more. All that is nowadays required to become an outstanding author is to come up with one well-pushed, well-hyped book and jump right into the pantheon with Susan Minot, Bob Shacochis, and Mona Simpson. It is fitting that the writers these three outstanding authors pick are as derivative and reeking of the trendy masters as themselves.

Three other outstanding authors—Cynthia Ozick, Joy Williams, and William Kennedy—do a slightly better job of picking but, to adapt Francis Stuart's evaluation of Frank O'Connor, these are "the knitters at the soft center of American writing." I, you, *they*—Rebecca Stone, Stephen Cooper, and Douglas Bauer—have all read these stories elsewhere and will keep reading them again and again.

Then there is Richard Ford, that outstanding American author of *The Sportswriter* who writes in the foreword to the anthology: "When I started to think of what to write here, I decided a list would help, a short menu of desideratums: must-do's without which the whole, old machine of writing will never be truly new or well—ignoring entirely the Great Books, the famous tricks of the trade, and of course talent."

I think it's safe to imagine the sort of writing Ford is interested in: "Art's spirit is serious in nature if not in demeanor, and at heart it is unselfish. If it could, it would always be a help. And here in the stories that follow and in the words said about them, its own needs are met, its requirements for survival generously, faithfully served."

The great American editor and outstanding writer Gordon Lish picked Lynn Grossman, of whom he has said:

> I can tell you all about Lynn Grossman. I have never had a drink with her, or a coffee with her or shared even as little (as much?) as a subway ride with her, but I am still willing to keep my shoulder to the assertion that I know all about Lynn Grossman. But you must not think that I think that it is because she has been, and still is, a student of mine that I think I know all about Lynn Grossman. You see, I am not that kind of teacher and Lynn Grossman is not that kind of student—meaning that for each of us the object is the story and not the person. Yet I am still offering you my claim to complete knowledge of Lynn Grossman. Indeed the reason I am so insistent as to the necessity of my claim is this—to wit, there is for me no way to pay a higher compliment to the force of a story. I mean that when a story does its work, there issues from it the exact mark of its maker. I mean that when Lynn Grossman made "The Sleeves" the force of it is, she disclosed her heart for the indelibility it is. I mean that I am glad to receive that heart—and to have the teacher's honor of passing it along to you.

Her story begins, "This all starts when my Wednesday cuts me back half-day from full day." It does not get any better.

It is sad to see Michael Stephens in this sea of "prose." Stephens is hardly a kid and wrote one of the best depictions of Irish-American life, *Season at Coole*. Nothing he has written since has been up to the high standard he set for himself then, though his play, *Our Father*, comes close. He has tried to twist himself away from his own experience, but this doesn't work, nor is he helped any by being introduced by Russell Banks, who is off frying other fish when he should be attending to what exactly it is that Michael Stephens is all about.

The best story in the book is by Pinckney Benedict and is introduced by Joyce Carol Oates, whose Ontario Review Press published his collection *Town Smokes*. Benedict is a writer of risk and courage. Witness the opening of his story: "Loftus and Bone headed over to the Bowl*O*Drome to take in the women's leagues and see if they could get Loftus's mind off of Arnette. Arnette was the redheaded woman that had run off with some college puke a couple days before and had broken Loftus's heart and shattered his life." The risk comes in laying out so much so clearly so early on, and then having the courage to balance it on an impoverished, debased language without the reader condescending; that is a remarkable achievement. Aware of all the traps that are awaiting Benedict, I hope he will fly them and trust his vision, so evident in this story and his collection. I am not optimistic, but I like the story's concluding lines: "And he was happy in the saying of it and proud to live in that fashion, even though he knew that for his suffering she would never leave him for another man again."

Do yourself a favor: bypass *Hot Type* and read Stephens' *Season at Coole* and Benedict's *Town Smokes*.

Thomas McGonigle is the author of The Corpse Dream of N. Petkov, *published by Dalkey Archive Press.*

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The Southern Myth

by Benjamin B. Alexander

The Lytle/Tate Letters: The Correspondence of Andrew Lytle and Allen Tate
edited by Thomas Daniel Young and Elizabeth Sarcone
Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi; 374 pp., $37.50

Southerners and Europeans: Essays in a Time of Disorder
by Andrew Lytle
Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press; 308 pp., $32.50

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Andrew Lytle and Allen Tate, two of the original Vanderbilt Agrarians, maintained a remarkable friendship spanning some half a century, from the early 20's until Tate's death in 1979. While both pursued prolific literary careers, their paths crossed less frequently, particularly as Tate became identified with modernist poetry and criticism in the Eliot tradition. Lytle, on the other hand, maintained his Southern loyalties, spent more time in his native region, and did not cultivate the Anglo-American attention that Tate, more than any of the original Vanderbilt Agrarians, sought. The influence of each is still evolving, particularly with the current publication of the Lytle-Tate correspondence and the collection of Lytle's literary essays entitled *Southerners and Europeans*. We are able to trace the multifaceted talents of each — Tate, a poet, editor, historian, and critic; Lytle, a novelist, historian, editor, and teacher of writing.

Initially Lytle and Tate found themselves, because of when they were born (Tate, 1899 and Lytle, 1902), at a prophetic crossroads in the understanding of American history and its mythical meaning. The legacy of a Protestant-inspired egalitarian democracy provided no comfort nor illuminated the historical complexities from which Tate and Lytle emerged in the early 20th century. In an 1872 speech, Paul Hamilton Hayne said of the Civil War, "many of the tongues have essayed to narrate its history, but not for us, not in our generation, can the 'Iliad' of the Southern war be said or sung!" Hayne's Homeric allusion anticipates the early Civil War writings of Tate and Lytle. Both devoted themselves to biographies of Southern leaders — Tate to Jefferson Davis, Stonewall Jackson, and Robert E. Lee, and Lytle to Nathan Bedford Forrest. Their early letters reveal both in substance and in the use of the folk idiom of Tennessee and Kentucky an oral and instinctive embrace of history. The past is no abstraction, but reveals itself as vivid memory and myth.

The letters of Lytle and Tate show the delight that both took in reliving the brief military and political fortunes of the Confederacy. The correspondence is a running account of their growing understanding of its meaning. We discover that both found themselves to be interpreters of the most intense fratricidal strife that the nation has ever witnessed. While the generals and leaders of the Confederacy had been completely absorbed in the military and tactical affairs of an abortive War of Independence, Lytle and Tate found themselves to be commanding another battle — the battle for the meaning of it all.

While Tate and Lytle attempted to solidify the national memory of the South by a vicarious identification with legendary leaders, their intellectual prowess allowed them to see the fissures in the emergent Confederate nation that were there from its beginnings. Both were linked by family ties and regional loyalties to the "old West" of Tennessee and Kentucky. And it is these loyalties that encouraged Lytle to question the location of the Confederate capitol at Richmond. Lytle believed that it should have been in Montgomery, Alabama. He writes Tate in 1929 that the geographic position of the deep South city "made it the ideal capitol of the Confederacy, without consideration of other strategic and political advantages." In the same letter Lytle remarks of a proposed settlement at a Virginia farm: "How can a Tennessean and Kentuckian return to Virginia? I have a suspicion that a Virginian doesn't differentiate much between one who comes from the North and one who comes from behind the Blue Ridge, and if he does, he will favor the carpetbagger to, shall I say, the scalawag."

These reflections, we find, are fueled even more by Tate's growing dislike of both the Confederacy's president, Jefferson Davis, and the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Robert E. Lee. Tate tells Lytle that "Davis never knew fundamentally what the war was all about. He really thought it was about political abstractions and civil liberties; it was fought (largely unconsciously) for that irrational good known as national independence."

But it is General Lee who comes in for Tate's severest rebuke. Initially, in the 1930's, Tate had undertaken to write an exemplary biography of Lee as the exemplary Virginian. But the more Tate analyzed Lee's career, the more he grew to dislike him. It was Lee who encouraged in President Davis what Tate identifies as a "capitulation to the Virginia viewpoint after he went to Richmond and his neglect of the West" (Tennessee and the lower South). Tate further faults Lee for his "state rights provincialism which led him to prefer doing his duty to winning the war — his duty being to Virginia alone," and goes on to suggest that "Lee had a kind of egoism that yielded to no influence — not even to the independence of his country. It was the egoism of self-righteousness, and it was absolutely unassailable." By 1931, Tate writes Lytle that he has come to despise Lee and suggests the prospect of continuing to write his biography is too much of an ordeal. At least, Tate concedes, Davis could be excused because of intellectual deficiency and weakness of character. Analyzing Lee, however, Tate can muster no such caveat, and says finally that under Lee's heroic surface there is "an abyss and it is to this that I do not want to give a name."

Lytle and Tate's advocacy of Agrarian freedom fighting, however, was blunted by the rhetorical power of *I'll Take My Stand*, which accentuated the perception of the romantic isolation of the Confederacy, "taking its stand." Tate and Lytle both believed that the allusion to the Confederacy's national anthem in *I'll Take My Stand* glorified the "Virginia ethos" — a sense of self-conscious abstract heroism that would become a later staple for sentimental images of the South. Tate and Lytle, on the other hand, saw in the Southern war the paradigm for the ethnic revolution of the soil, and preferred calling

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the Southern exposition of the Agrarian legacy *Tracts Against Communism*. The political pattern is as old as Abraham and as timely as Solidarity in Poland, the *mujahideen* of Afghanistan, and a variety of other Eastern ethnics — Armenians, Lithuanians, Estonians, and others — who are testing Soviet *glasnost* with tentative assertions of folk identity and religious liberty. In this way, Tate and Lytle's view of the "War of Northern Aggression" against Confederate freedom fighters provides the American model for the defense of liberty. And in the Southern exercise in folk rebellion, Lytle and Tate recognize a potent catalyst for both the essence and legacy of indigenous but exportable American freedom.

The renascence of ethnic and religious zeal in Eastern Europe, given spiritual sanction by the Catholic Church, provides a pattern that Tate and Lytle envisioned in 1930 in their own understanding of the Southern political ethos. Yet there is one important difference in contemporary people's revolts of Eastern Europe: while the icons of the Virgin Mary and the pope provide inspiration to members of Solidarity, the Southern Agrarian experience was, at best, Protestant-inspired. From Tate's earliest participation in the Agrarian campaign of the 1930's, he was aware of the absence of religious cohesion in the South, and he reflected on this matter over the years. In a remarkable letter written to Lytle in 1954, Tate observes, "in retrospect upon our early days, we made of the South, and especially the Old South, an object of idolatry, in the strict sense of the word: we were worshiping a 'perishable god.' I have come to the view that no society is worth 'saving' as such: what we must save is the truth of God and Man, and the right society follows. We thought that the South was an historical problem: it was actually a theological problem."

The original activist Agrarian rebuke of statism deepened over the years into a larger critique of pervasive cultural materialism of Western societies and an attendant spiritual exhaustion. In Lytle's *Southerners and Europeans: Essays in a Time of Disorder*, the reference to disorder emphasizes Lytle's gradual shift from Agrarian activism to theological reflection and analysis. This transition can be traced to the difficult research and writing of *At the Moon's Inn* (1941) to which he alludes in "The Subject of Southern Fiction."

Lytle's most ambitious novel is *The Velvet Horn* (1957). In "The Working Novelist and the Mythmaking Process," one of the most revealing essays ever written by a novelist on the nature of fiction, Lytle reveals how he, as the "working novelist," discovers the mythical meaning of Southern history. After some years of working on the novel Lytle discovered to his surprise that he was not treating directly the historical post-Civil War Tennessee, but that he was tracing a myth from the Book of Genesis. It was, he writes, "an aspect of an 'ancient drama'" — "the state Adam and Eve found themselves in after Eve had been taken from Adam's side."

It is unfortunate that the LSU volume does not include such essays as "The Search for Order in American Society: The Southern Response" and "A Habitable Garden." *The Velvet Horn* belongs with the canonical books of American literature — with *Huckleberry Finn*, *Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Go Down Moses*. It also demonstrates the full development of what Lewis Simpson, in the introduction to Lytle's collected essays, calls the Tennesseean's "moral vision" that "has always embraced European and American writers as necessarily constituting one community." Lytle's readings of Caroline Gordon, Robert Penn Warren, and Faulkner are presented together with an equally penetrating elucidation of Tolstoy, Flaubert, Joyce, and Ford Madox Ford. As early as 1959 Tate recognized Lytle's critical gifts and remarked in a letter, "you have defined the orbit for fiction in the future."

Benjamin B. Alexander is an assistant professor of English and religious studies at Hillsdale College in Michigan, and lecturer in English at Catholic University of America.

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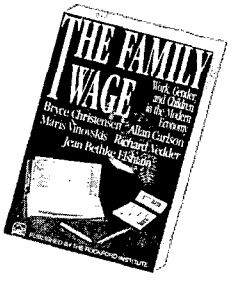

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REDSKIN WRITING

The West, by which Americans meant the frontier, has defined one of the poles of American literature. New England, and the Northeast in general, have always represented our sense of standing in the long shadows of European civilization, and even the best Northeastern writers — Hawthorne and Irving, to take only two examples — were seduced into writing and living as Europeans. Frontier writers, roughly identical with Philip Rahv's "redskins," were more willing to take America as they found it, as oysters should be eaten: raw.

The most obvious early examples of frontier literature were the humorous Southern sketches of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet (*Georgia Scenes*) and Joseph Glover Baldwin (*Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi*). Following the path of so many Southerners, including Mark Twain, Baldwin — originally a Virginian — ended up in California. Twain is, of course, the best known Southern frontier humorist, but his reputation for originality and uniqueness depends on our ignorance of his predecessors.

Of course, not all frontier writers are humorists or even Westerners. (The best of William Gilmore Simms is devoted to a period when South Carolina was still the frontier, and Simms deserves an honored place as godfather to Western literature.) But down-home humor, exaggeration, and crudeness have always been as much a part of Western writing as of Western living. No living writer better exemplifies the type than Edward Abbey: independent and strong-minded (or eccentric and prejudiced, if you don't care for him), Abbey has written some of the best Western fiction — *The Lonely Cowboy* — as well as some of the best essays devoted to Western themes.

His latest novel, *The Fool's Progress* (New York: Henry Holt; 485 pp., $19.95), is vintage Abbey, Abbey taken raw. It is a suspiciously autobiographical tale of a West Virginian who moves to the Southwest after World War II. After a series of jobs as philosophy TA, park ranger, and welfare bureaucrat, and a series of wives, mistresses, and casual girl friends, Henry Lightcap is headed back to Stump Creek, West Virginia. Along the way, the reader is treated to the major episodes of his life and introduced to a rogue's gallery of characters strange enough to please Harry Crews: Henry's IWW father, who is opposed to "Roosevelt's War" and tells his son not to enlist, but is at the same time proud of his exploits; brother Will, who comes back from the war determined to live the old life on the farm — Wendell Berry without the poetry; a cowboy artist who gets rich on land speculations; and an assortment of straight-shooting, hard-drinking veterans.

What Henry and his friends have in common is an instinctive refusal to sell out and live the lives that are created for them by marketing executives and social planners. For good or ill, they are their own men, and it is small wonder that most women prefer one of them — when they can find one — to the computer salesmen with soft palms and limp mustaches, who have memorized a list of good chardonnays, and keep a rough draft of their Dewar's profile ready just in case. Abbey's roughnecks — now reduced to something like an outlaw status — may be all that is left of the true American type, going all the way back to Captain John Smith.

A former practicing liberal, Henry now has strong views on every conceivable "minority" group, but he reserves his best shots for Latinos and Orientals. "The cultural riches" Mexicans have given us, he reasons, come down to "Tacos . . . Nachos. Burritos. Salsa music. Spray-paint art. *Patrón*-style politics. Plastic Madonnas on acrylic-plush dashboards and other intellectual, scientific and artistic treasures I'm sure I could think of if I really set my mind to it."

Here is Henry a few pages later on the Japanese: "Rice Rockets, Niki-Tiki sewing machines. Hondas, Toyotas, Sonys, Kawasakis. Tofu metallics, noodle-soup plastic. Vile cheap imported garbage: to think that we Americans, in our blindness and stupidity, should throw our own people out of work, shut down our great mills, let the Forest Service clear-cut our forests and the BLM strip-mine our hills and the beef industry gnaw down our rangelands to the bone in order to produce raw materials to trade to those Niponese [sic] ant people in exchange for their bright cheap slick robot-manufactured electro-mechanical junk, none of which, not one single item of which, we actually need."

If anyone thinks this is just a fictional character talking, he hasn't read Abbey's essays. And here is the problem with this moving and entertaining book. Abbey has become so angry and so committed to his principles, he has trouble writing with the openness to experience that characterizes the great novelist. The fact that he's right about most things (with the exception of religion, where he's half right in despising most of its current manifestations) doesn't necessarily make it work. *The Fool's Progress* may not be Abbey's best novel, but — part fiction, part satire — it is still a wonderful book.

The University of Oklahoma Press has recently put out *Recollections of Charley Russell* by Frank Bird Linderman ($10.95, paper). The author was a close friend of the renowned cowboy artist, and the scattered recollections are worth dipping into.

The greatest American writer to tackle the West (although not necessarily the greatest Western writer) was Mark Twain, whose letters are being published by the University of California Press. Volume one covers the period 1853 to 1866 and includes much of his Western adventures. The letters are lively, amusing, and in most cases informative, although it would be very hard for the casual reader to figure out which side Clemens was on during the war. As a traitor to his state and deserter from the Confederate Army, he was understandably ambivalent. While publicly wrapping himself in the Union flag, he was privately writing to his Southern friends as if their cause were still his. In any case, Twain-fanciers — which includes almost every reader in America — will want to purchase this and succeeding volumes.

An interesting sidelight on the West is provided by a new study of the Hatfield/McCoy war: *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* by Altina L. Waller (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; 313 pp., $32.50). While telling the story of the feud, Waller explains the conflict was not so much the result of personal animosities or of an inherently violent Appalachian nature as it was a contest for power between the progressive and well-to-do McCoys, who favored economic development and outside interests, and the old-fashioned Hatfields, who retained their faith in local traditions and community autonomy. (TF)

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Letter From the Northwest

by Catherine Rudolph

Breaking the Cowboys

◆

I had occasion to visit Pendleton, Oregon recently. It is the "purple mountains' majesty, above the fruited plain" that we sing about, only the peaks that rim the valley bowl are the Blue Mountains, and the fruit of the land is animal as well as vegetable.

Pendleton is famous for its glorious woolens, which you can read about in *Vogue* and buy across America. Its other claim to fame is the Pendleton Round-Up, a rodeo and in-gathering of the people who still ride the range for a living.

The Round-Up features competitions that demonstrate the sparkle experience lends to natural ability: you think you can only watch so many guys lasso and hogtie a frightened calf, and then a cowboy comes on the scene who puts that extra little fillip into the way he throws his rope and downs the calf in such a deft way that you wouldn't have missed the poetry of it.

There are cowgirls, too, and the people who recruit fashion models should stop traveling to Sweden if they want the lean, clean look. The ladies and gentlemen of the ranch are spare and elegant enough for a Ralph Lauren ad, and the buckles on their belts are works of art (a sterling silver beauty with garnets costs $100).

The round-up also symbolizes, in the most basic fashion, the clash between the urban regulators who govern from western Washington and Oregon, and the hardworking souls in the eastern part of the states who wrest a living from the land. People who have not paid the price for the livelihood threaten it.

Coming up I-84 from Salt Lake City, you pass through the thundering barrenness of southern Idaho. No respectable jackrabbit would live there, and on this trip, coming back from a close friend's birthday celebration, I didn't spot any. As you come closer to Boise, life starts to appear again, and on the greening edge of western Idaho, there are cattle and potatoes.

Then you come to the marvelous accidents of weather and geography that make Washington and Oregon so interesting. Volcanic and glacial activity have made tall mountains and deep valleys, and around La Grande, Oregon, one such accident has made topsoil as black as bear fur, as rich and verdant as any I saw when I lived in Iowa, our nation's most fortunate state when it comes to good dirt. But mostly, the people who live east of the Cascade Mountains have to deal with semiarid land that is none too rich.

So the "drysiders" need irrigation water and fertilizers (organic or otherwise) to coax the land to support pasture or wine grapes. This year, water has been in short supply here, as in the Midwest. The focus of the national media has been on areas that can be covered from the Chicago bureau, but the drought has caused hardship in a hard land, coming on the heels of years of regulation. The rewards of hard work—houses on the hill that would suit a Spanish grandee; property that is measured in hectares—are threatened by the natural cycles of rainfall and the unnatural demands of the regulators.

Bureaucrats who work for the same governor who campaigns on a platform of good jobs and good wages rob the people of their labor. A ranch is labor-intensive, even at its most efficient. A machine cannot free a calf stuck in a fence, nor break the ice from the surface of the water supply in the dead of winter. A sheep lost on a ridge of lava rock must be retrieved on horseback or on foot. This is a special job for an individual who is patient, tough, and deft.

The livestock have to go to market, more cheaply if the market is close at hand. The environmental regulators have already driven the meat-packing industry out of Washington State (fortunately, some of it landed in Idaho), and over the past few years have begun to fret over the proximity of cattle to lakes and streams. It seems they regard manure as a threat to the purity of the water supply, saying it may kill the occasional salmon.

These regulations are mostly written to protect coastal streams, but are in effect statewide. So an older rancher, squinting into the clouded looking glass for the future, might decide he's had enough, and let his cowhands look for another job.

Across the Columbia from Pendleton, in Richland, Washington, the clever environmentalists have robbed the state of brains as well as money. They have managed, with the governor of Washington's able assistance, to irk the federal government until it has shut down the N-Reactor at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. All the high-salaried engineers who have made Richland such a bright spot in the state's economy and intellectual life will take their salaries and their intelligent children to South Carolina. Their experimental projects and the industrial spinoffs from those projects will leave with them. In a few years, some backwater town in South Carolina will be shinier and wealthier and have a dazzling youth symphony because these engineers have settled there.

My ancestors and their traveling companions, who came to the West on the Oregon Trail in the 1840's, would not have dreamed of this when they came down Dead Man's Pass into the smooth bowl that is Pendleton. They knew that when their journey had ended, still another would begin: to wrest a living off the land they had come to. To read their diaries is to marvel at human endurance and to scar the soul.

The people who came to this place were truly the people of the edge. Their ancestors had jumped off the shores of Europe to reach America, with a second jump into the Northwest Territories (as the Midwest was then called), and these children of pioneers took one more treacherous leap, a long one, across mountain and desert, un-

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der a waterless sky, to reach fertile land. They would find it hard to imagine that such long strides were taken at so great a cost, only to have those who came after driven from the soil, not by nature but by ignorant rule.

Modern ranch hands coming down the Dead Man's Pass travel the 6 percent grade in fourwheel drive trucks, then rumble by yellow flowering sagebrush and flowing wheat to reach the rodeo. Even with a paved road and conveniences, you still sense, as in much of the West, that your presence is tenuous.

The cowboys and cowgirls at the Pendleton Round-Up must be edgy from more than adrenalin when they slip the noose around the neck of the calf: perhaps they know how it feels.

Catherine Rudolph has worked as a consultant on Republican campaigns up to the presidential level. She lives in Olympia, Washington, and is now writing a novel.

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Songs of the South

◆

I like that old-time rock and roll. I'm sure nostalgia has a lot to do with it: the older I get the better the 50's look. But there's more to it than that. I like what the music says about America, and especially about the South. Let me explain.

Some time ago, a geographer at Oklahoma State mapped the birthplaces of country-music notables—singers, songwriters, and musicians. The resulting map makes his entire career worthwhile. Not surprisingly, it shows that country music has been *Southern* music. Give or take a speck here and there in Canada or Montana or Okie-land California, the people who make it have come overwhelmingly from the South. But it also shows that they're not from just anywhere in the South. Most are from a fertile crescent that reaches from southwest Virginia through Kentucky and the eastern two-thirds of Tennessee, over into northern Arkansas, southeast Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas. Country music, in other words, is a product of the fringe, of the margins of the region proper, of Appalachia, the Ozarks, the Southwest. The map defines the South by sketching its boundary: there's very little inside. The Deep South appears as a near-vacuum (although not a black hole like New England).

But when one of my students did a similar map of the origins of blues singers and we overlaid it on the country-music map, it filled in the Deep South nicely. The two maps together clearly showed the South—black and white, separate but equal—to be the great seedbed of American music (or, as John Seelye calls it, "AM"; FM, of course, stands for "foreign music"). But they also made it plain, as I said, that for a long time white folks didn't do much singing in the Deep South, perhaps because they had blacks to do it for them. (The image of Slim Pickens in *Blazing Saddles* comes irresistibly to mind, as does the similar, but not at all funny, scene in James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.)

When Deep South white boys *did* start to sing, though, 30-odd years ago, they showed that they'd been listening. What they gave us was "rockabilly"—half "hillbilly," half black rhythm-and-blues, a wild half-breed music. Along with some black folks who were mostly Southerners, too, Elvis and Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis and Charlie Rich and Ronnie Hawkins and Conway Twitty and the Everly Brothers gave us rock and roll.

And although it has been little noted, the musical influence went both ways. Everyone knows how Elvis grew up listening to Rufus Thomas and Big Mama Thornton, thus becoming the answer to Sam Phillips's prayer for a white singer with a Negro sound. Just so, his fellow Tennesseean Bobby Bland talks of how "we used to listen to the radio every morning to people like Roy Acuff, Lefty Frizzell, Hank Williams and Hank Snow," and says "I think hillbilly has more of a story than people give it credit for." Bland, of course, is black.

With this genealogy, rock and roll really was something different, especially for the South. It made for one of the few experiences shared by young Southerners across the racial divide. Opinions differed about rock and roll—they were meant to—but not along racial lines. Black or white, most Southerners now of approximately menopausal age grew up making out to the same music, on the same radio stations. In the Carolinas and Virginia it was gentle "beach music." Over the mountains, in my part of the South, it was tougher, meaner, raunchier—and WLAC, Nashville, was the place to go for it. I was pleased when Don Williams included a reference to WLAC's John R in his nostalgic country song, "Good Old Boys Like Me," and I was amused when Bobbie Ann Mason wrote in *The New Yorker* (of all places) about listening to WLAC while growing up in Kentucky. But I was actually moved when Steven Millner, a black professor at Ole Miss, mentioned WLAC on William Buckley's *Firing Line*. Listening to WLAC's juxtaposition of Hank Ballard and the Midnighters with suggestive ads for White Rose Petroleum Jelly was a mere thread across the chasm of segregation, but it was that.

Some saw rock and roll as a threat to Western civilization, and that was part of its charm. Preachers preached against it. Pious teenagers took to the platform to witness against it. Sanctimonious small-town radio stations banned it. But it was no threat—just the opposite. Consider what it replaced.

Browsing in the record bin at a local thrift shop one day last summer, I came across an old Phil Harris LP. Two of the songs on it, "That's What I Like About the South" and "The Darktown Poker Club," were sides A and B of an old 78 that I must have worn out sometime in the early 1950's. For fifty cents I bought the record and took it home.

LIBERAL ARTS

Why We Love New York

One child talking to another at the Central Park Zoo: "Look, a baby seal! And there's his mother. Or his father. Or his au pair."

—from the November 7, 1988 issue of New York *magazine.*

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I used to love those songs. I remember playing them over and over. But listening to them now, I realize that they are horrible: musically, culturally, in every way. Phil Harris, this white man from Ohio, was working in the coon song tradition. From the middle of the last century until the middle of this one, that tradition produced literally scores of demeaning songs that white folks apparently found inexhaustibly amusing. We need to be reminded of how awful they were, if only so as to understand that black folks really do have reason to be ticked off.

For my part, listening with embarrassment to these songs that I once loved uncritically made me glad that God sent rock and roll when he did—sometime during my junior high years. Even a screaming, eye-shadowed flamer like Little Richard was a more wholesome influence on American race relations than Phil Harris. Rock and roll was a definite improvement, and I don't care what Allan Bloom says.

But the Golden Age of biracial Southern hegemony in rock and roll was short-lived. By 1960, it had given way to the era of the teen idols: Ricky Nelson and Fabian and Dion and the Bobbies—Bobby Vinton, Bobby Darin, Bobby Vee—meretricious, marketed, mediocre. (About the same time, as I recall, something similar happened to the presidency.) When the Beatles came along, they probably got a better reception than they deserved because these guys were so bad. The Fab Four were OK when they did old Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis numbers (Ringo tended to sing them), but "Norwegian Wood"? Come *on*.

I guess the 60's were OK for those who were stoned the whole time. For the rest of us, though, "A Whiter Shade of Pale" just didn't hack it. If we worked at it, we could find songs worth listening to, and not all of them by Southerners like Delaney and Bonnie, either: Eric Clapton and Joe Cocker and some of the other English rockers knew where the bodies were buried, and the Rolling Stones were arguably the greatest rock and roll band ever. But the dominant, drugged-out stream that flowed from the Beatles and wound up at the Fillmore left me cold.

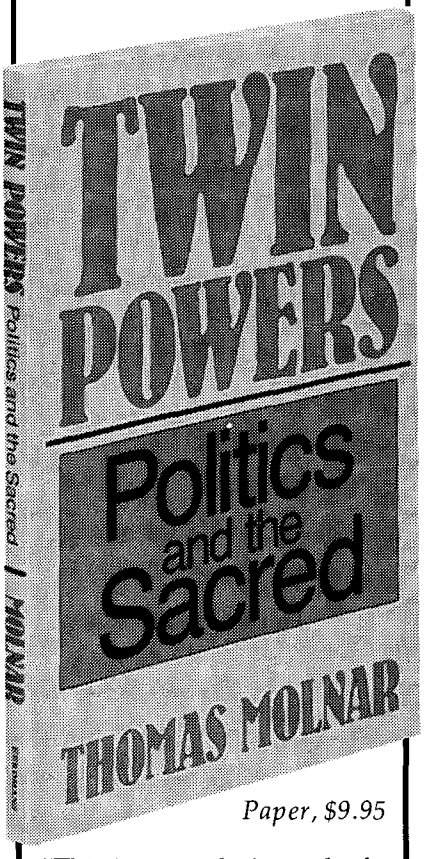
And sometime in the 70's, I lost it altogether. Now I can't tell the difference between New Wave and heavy metal—and frankly I don't care. I can recognize that Prince is the Little Richard of the 80's, but even that recognition doesn't make him any easier to listen to. Some of my contemporaries claim that the torch has been passed to Bruce Springsteen, but I don't see it. For starters, how can you take someone named Bruce seriously as a rocker? (No offense, you Bruces out there, but it is a lot like Bobby.)

So where does an old rock-and-roller turn these days? Country music is where I turn, back to the source. To me, these days, it often sounds more like rock and roll than rock and roll does. Listen to Hank Williams Jr.'s recent "Born to Boogie" album, for example. The words of the title cut aren't much, but it's got a good beat and you can dance to it. "Honky Tonk Women" goes up against the memory of Mick Jagger and pummels him to a draw. "Keep Your Hands to Yourself" covers a hit by the Georgia Satellites, a neotraditional group I wish well, if only because their leader told *Southern* magazine that "[t]he last vestiges of regionalism should be hung onto like a Doberman with a sweater." My favorite is probably a solid rocker called "Buck Naked" (which Hank pronounces "nekkid," of course, in keeping with Lewis Grizzard's observation that, in Southern English, "naked" means you ain't got no clothes on, while "nekkid" means you ain't got no clothes on and you're up to something). And that's just Side A: five songs, four of them pretty fair rock and roll.

Like the rock and roll of 30 years ago, the rocking country of Charlie Daniels and Waylon Jennings and Hank Williams Jr. should be listened to in smoky dives, on crowded dance floors, or in steamy parked cars. This is, in short, good-time music. Ignoring that fact is part of what was wrong with the 60's, and I've come perilously close to doing it here. Rock and roll shouldn't be treated solemnly.

But that doesn't mean it can't be taken seriously.

From 1961 to 1963, John Shelton Reed was the host of "Rock and Roll Memory Time" on the student FM station at MIT, playing those great old songs of 1956-1960.



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Letter From Albion

by Andrei Navrozov

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◆

"Poets in our civilization," a famous poet wrote in his most famous essay, "must be difficult." He went on to explain his thought, and his English-speaking audience understood him. When the thought was translated, it went on living in other languages. But would an English-speaking audience understand his famous lines:

Please come with me
When night
Like a man undergoing
surgery . . .?

Or, for that matter, would *any* audience understand these lines and appreciate them as poetry? Yet, quite possibly, this is just what the opening of "Prufrock" sounds like in another language.

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out
against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon
a table . . .

But why translate back into English the words of a hypothetical translation of an English poem into another language? I have just finished translating "Prufrock" for the winter number of *Kontinent*, the Russian-language émigré quarterly, and this is how it begins:

Let us go for a walk, us two,
When the volume of autumn
twilight
Is expanded as through
tears . . .

What gibberish, you may say. Well, I have worked on my translation for many months, and I hope my Russian readers think otherwise. The point is that, unfortunately, of the three quotations above only the middle one can be understood and appreciated as poetry in English.

All this is by way of introducing my reactions to a book of poetry recently published in England. Let us open it at random:

We have learned, indeed,
to throw time into tins
And have stirred in the
condensed night at all times.

This century grows ever darker,
and the next will not
come soon,
To wipe clean the names
off yesterday's prison wall.

Thus begins a translation of a poem by Irina Ratushinskaya in her collection *Pencil Letter*, published simultaneously with her memoir *Grey Is the Color of Hope*. It is astonishing how much this English "equivalent" of the poem sounds like our hypothetical "Please come with me/When night/Like a man undergoing surgery . . ." And yet, there it is.

Why on earth would this poet—any poet—want to "throw time into tins"? If she tried to preserve time by canning, or tinning, it, that would be understandable—that would be a metaphor. But to "throw" it? Throw it *away*—perhaps. Throw it *at* something—possibly. But certainly not *into*, especially not "into tins." Still, let us imagine that she has something in mind. Surely throwing a thing into a tin is an easy operation; surely throwing it into a tin cannot require a great deal of learning. Then why "We have learned"? After all, that is how the poem begins; there must be some news in the line, some fact deserving of our attention. And, to top it all, that preposterous "indeed"!

If you are so smart, someone said, why don't you just translate it yourself, instead of carrying on like a maniac? I have. But I do not wish to sound didactic. It's just that I cannot understand how anybody can be so tone-deaf. In offering my own version of the poem to the reader of *Chronicles* I merely want him to agree that—unlike the version just quoted—it *could* have been written by a poet. Honestly, that's all I want. For the answer to the question, "Is poetry simply a set of arbitrary words describing meaningless actions?" has to be, in the mind of a *Chronicles* reader, an unequivocal No. Otherwise I'm out of a job.

As I said, all of this is by way of introducing my impressions of Ratushinskaya, for it is poetry, no more and no less, that she writes in Russian, and it was for the writing of poetry, no more and no less, that she was imprisoned in Russia. The poems she wrote during her ordeal in isolation cells and prison camps are more than a testament to her suffering: they are a new, iridescent incrustation upon the surface of Russian culture. This is why it is so painful to see her work, which years of physical and spiritual torture had failed to emasculate, trivialized and profaned by civilized and carefree men and women who transmute these crystals of anguish into lumpy *vers libres*, often with a "feminist" message.

Grey Is the Color of Hope is a factual record of those years. "Never believe them, never fear them, never ask them for anything!" was the key lesson of the poet's schooling, which began with her arrest in 1982 on a charge of "anti-Soviet agitation." Judging by Ratushinskaya's public utterances, it seems she is not about to unlearn that lesson now—as the wishful, ever-wishful West reads a desperate faith into her former captors' every pose, including the pose of clemency that they struck announcing her release in October 1986. That particular pose, she understands, was timed to coincide with the Reykjavik summit.

"It's nonsense to talk about limited human rights," Ratushinskaya recently told an interviewer, "it's like limited breath." Indeed, is it not nonsense to talk about human rights at all—as if these were a natural phenomenon, more or less limited under different regional conditions? Would it not be more accurate to say that human rights have never been limited in Soviet Russia—for the simple reason that they have never existed in Soviet Rus-

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sia? Half-intuitively, half-rationally, Ratushinskaya knows, it seems, that what *has* existed is a succession of tactical decisions, made by the rulers of totalitarian Russia in their 70-year effort to deceive and disarm the free West. As part of that effort, Lenin's New Economic Policy, Stalin's New Constitution, Khrushchev's New Liberalism, and the present-day New Openness have all done their job. What they have not done is give the individual even a tiny grain of genuine freedom — which is, and has always been, the ability to defend himself against tyranny. Like it or not, the totalitarian order is immutable, and only its visible features — from criminal justice to poetry, from Ratushinskaya's arrest to her release — vary to suit its propaganda needs of the moment.

Indeed, in Ratushinskaya's world, the color of hope is grey. The prison walls of that world do not divide the free from the unfree: they encircle it, like some sort of inverted paradise within which they delineate concentric circles of diminishing physical liberty. Yet intellectually a denizen of this paradise is as free in the first circle as in the last. Paradoxically, Ratushinskaya was not deprived of freedom when, still in her 20's, she began her prison journey: she merely crossed from one state of unfreedom into the next, both of them essentially physical. Nor did she ever manage to reach the lowest circles of the paradise; in fact, her life in the "Small Zone" of JH-385/3, the Barashevo camp in Mordovia, was almost as comfortable, in physical terms, as it is for millions of Russians on the "outside." The poet was confined to a special unit for political prisoners: unlike, for instance, the death of Anatoly Marchenko in December 1986, her death from cold, starvation, or torture would have been a public-relations setback for the Soviets in the West. This is why the prisoners in Ratushinskaya's unit had a hot plate and a television set. This is why Ratushinskaya had a pencil, with which to write her *Letter*.

Reading all but a handful of translations in *Pencil Letter* (those by Alyona Kojevnikov), I kept thinking they were written with crayons.

Andrei Navrozov is the poetry editor of Chronicles.

Poem

by Irina Ratushinskaya
translated by Andrei Navrozov

They have learned, I suppose,
  to make time preserve,
With the extract of night
  sprinkled into each tense.
But the twentieth's dark
And the rest none too early
To erase bygone names
  off the prisonyard fence.
We would load it with care,
With the voices of friends now silent,
For the sake of the fence
  with the names of children unborn.
With such love we would rig it,
  though never to sail it:
We are never the crew
  and not even allowed on board.
With the requisite load
  underneath the coarse rags,
There is time to run our hands
  through the grain,
To draw blood from the palms
But pick out the teeth of the dragons
From the seed that is bound
  to sprout some day.

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Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

Walt Disney Rolls Over in His Grave

◆

Fun for the whole family, the ad for the movie said. (I was relieved to know that it wasn't zany or laff-packed, although later I would have settled for that.) Our kids, then eight and 13, deserved a celebration for lasting through the final day of school before Christmas vacation, so, loaded with grotesque candy and Cokes, we took in Steven Spielberg's inevitable Christmas offering, **Batteries Not Included.*

The movie was *made* for kids, with obvious good guys and bad guys, an early hint of what everyone over six knows will turn into a romance, and the cutest little doe-eyed flying alien soup cans to hit the big screen since E.T. came out of the closet. Good clean fun. Watching our kids giggle, my husband and I smiled at each other in self-congratulation: we should do this more often.

And then the gigantic painted breasts lit up the screen and hung there for what seemed forever.

The movie wasn't *about* breasts. It was about love and fidelity and determination. And yet someone making a salary in the high seven figures thought it necessary to move in for a 27-second close-up of that painting, those breasts looming larger than Volkswagens.

We're to blame, I guess. We put the kids in the car and took them there.

Last year, near the beginning of *Harry and the Hendersons*, a truly gentle movie, the film-family's young son shouted, "Holy s--t." Our son, who can't remember to turn off the water after he washes his hands (which, admittedly, isn't often), remembered that word as we were driving home. He reminded us that it was wrong, which was gratifying, but for crying out loud, we *took* him to that movie. We *wanted* him to see it. What's a kid supposed to think?

Then there was the night when he was suffering from chicken pox and feeling generally miserable. I rented the best medicine I could think of: a Disney movie about a baby dinosaur. He cuddled on my lap and watched (a) a savage human stabbing, (b) a baby dinosaur taken cruelly from his mother, (c) a long scene where shots were pumped into the mother dinosaur, (d) her agonizing death as Baby watched, and (e) endless minutes of full-backal and half-frontal nudity culminating in (f) a sweaty lovemaking scene. The person who invented fast-forwarding deserves a Nobel.

But it's still those breasts that fill me with wonder. They were more gratuitous and more disruptive than anything I've seen in months. It's not as though they were designed to entice adult males into the theater: no one who would pay $4 to sit in the midst of crunching runts and nerds and (inevitably) in front of a kicker, just to glimpse half a minute of a bad painting of breasts — no one who would do this is a major consideration of the movie-marketing industry.

So why?

For starters, moviemakers are prodigal idiots. They used to have our complete trust, and look what they've done with it. On the other hand, *we're* the ones who keep taking our kids to *see* these movies. *We're* to blame for not squandering three hours and spending upwards of $3.75 per person (slightly less for a tape) to screen, privately, every film we think our children would enjoy. Our only excuse is that life is short and kiddie art is long and expensive, but if that's what it takes to be good parents, we should do it. (How about a special ticket for parents who want to screen movies, which will get them in for free the second time if they bring at least one child back with them? How about offering parents detailed *written* descriptions of movies? How about making "parental guidance" more of a realistic possibility, if it's suggested by the movie's rating?)

Something's been lost before I ever had a chance to appreciate it. I remember being loaded into the back of a station wagon with my brother, both of us in our pajamas (and *nobody* was buckled up!), to go to the drive-in with our parents. It was Iowa summer, still hot and very light when we left the house, and as the cicadas throbbed we ate homemade popcorn until dark, watched whatever was showing until we got tired, and then lay on the foam my father had put in the back and punched each other until we fell asleep. We didn't go to the drive-in often, but when we did it was an occasion made even more special by its impetuousness. Our parents were secure in their faith that Walt Disney or John Wayne or Jerry Lewis would be all that the family hoped for, and more.

It's irresponsible for a parent to be impetuous these days. I still love the movies, but now if one merely makes me laugh or cry, I count it a success. I've stopped hoping for whatever it was we used to know we'd find. Integrity, maybe.

Jane Greer's first crush was on Marlon Brando in The Young Lions.

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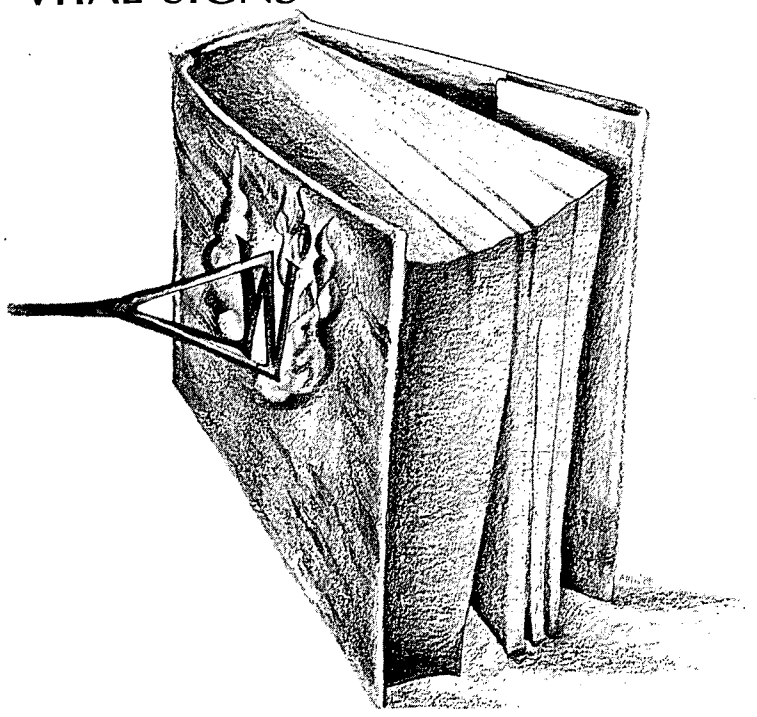
LITERATURE

A View From the Top of the Ridge

by M.E. Bradford

On the Literature of the American West



For the last several weeks, working at a leisurely pace, I have been reading through the new and extremely ambitious *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. This is a huge work, one which has many merits and aspires to be inclusive. Indeed, it is a conscious attempt to practice the "new literary history"—a generous mix of interpretive strategies. But in one respect it offers nothing more than a slight modification of the familiar tendency of the Northeast to confuse itself with the rest of the country—to take its own peculiar taste too seriously. For in the 1,263 pages of this history nothing is said about the literature of the American West. All that we find to break such silence is a chapter on Mexican-American writers (included for the sake of ethnic diversity) and a little praise for the Kiowa poet and novelist M. Scott Momaday, with the brief comment that the West is "not a region" but rather an expectation, "all future and mobility."

Such a turning away from a corpus of serious literature, distinguished both by subject and by relation to a specific scene, is difficult to explain. That is, unless we remember the arrogance of the New York cultural establishment: a blindness found even beyond the Metropolis in its academic outposts, in the accounts of fashionable historians and critics who reluctantly acknowledge the regional particularity of a Southern literature or the distinctive inheritance of three hundred years' worth of New England authors, but doubt that anything Western should command their attention.

This omission functions as if to say that there is something wrong with the Western milieu itself, that it is essentially melodramatic or vulgar, suitable only to cinematic, stylized treatment and not a context for serious imaginative creation as defined in most literate communities. However, the scholars who have assembled the *Columbia Literary History* do nothing in explaining the cultural record of the United States that their predecessors have not done before them—going back even to the beginnings, to narratives of early exploration and settlement that evade or distort these experiences by seeing them through European eyes. For a literature of pure and unmixed possibility, one that assumes as axiomatic the significance of individual human free agency, while at the same time unfolding its characteristic action within a framework that posits the force and value of nature as a reality independent of man, has always been a literature that made the inheritors of the European Enlightenment very uneasy. Spokesmen for either the highly refined or the deracinated versions of the "Republic of Letters" do not easily perceive the essentially American events, those that embody the archetype of going outward and then returning: a pattern of hard pastoral, which includes in homecoming a distillation of the truth-to-self experienced while far away. The explanation for this estrangement of interpreters from their subject, of Cambridge, Morningside Heights, and New Haven from Durango, Cheyenne, and Salt Lake City, is an appropriate point of departure for any contemporary commentary on Western American literature.

The prime difficulty in commenting upon the literature of *westering*, out of a background in other British and American writing, is that a corporate myth informs most of the works that locate their central action either in a European setting or in the American settlements east of the frontier. Western American literature contains no such corporate myth, no sense of collective purpose beyond a desire to continue in the Western setting.

New England as such had no beckoning West, only a dark forest to be cut down and subdued, according to a mythos derived from the Old Testament and summarized in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown." The New England sense of mission rests on a myth of covenant and of a special relation to the Deity. The region's sense of itself as a "second Israel," of its redemptive errand into the wilderness by means of which human history might be transformed, of the zealous labors of God's elect, has been well and thoroughly described in a body of dis-

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tinguished scholarship, beginning with the studies of Samuel Eliot Morison and Perry Miller, and reaching fulfillment in the most recent writings of Edmund Morgan, Ernest Lee Tuveson, and Sacvan Bercovitch.

The Southern corporate myth is another matter—one I have attempted to describe in the opening chapters of my *Generations of the Faithful Heart*. For the South was an England transplanted, not a Protestant Zion—a relocation and modification on these shores of a beloved but mortal inheritance, not an attempt to leap backward or forward into "sacred time." Southern writers (from *The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia* and Michael Drayton to Donald Davidson and Allen Tate) often specify their commitment to this version of the American enterprise with allusions to Vergil's vision of Rome as a second Troy. The myth of the middle colonies, of Philadelphia, Trenton, and New York—a premise or ground epitomized in the genial figure (and *Autobiography*) of Benjamin Franklin, and in the stories of that busy young fellow, Horatio Alger—also has its collective characteristics; it fosters these as an inherited "way," even though that *habitus* implies in its essence a vision of unrestrained private ambition. It envisages a world held together by trade, sustained by commercial law—and by the kind of amity that is generated by mutually profitable commercial exchange. This is the dream of Adam Smith and of the Scottish Enlightenment, broadly understood—though Federalists/Whigs/Republicans may give to it a slightly more mercantilist, centralizing flavor.

The point to be made out of these alternative American models is that the characteristic action of *westering* (which is now subsumed in the literature of our Western states) is distinctive, because it is accomplished without the support of any such inclusive image of group purpose. Though it may presuppose recollections and expectations of a corporate framework, of a Dixie to go home to "when the work's all done next fall" (as in the old cowboy ballad), or of a desire to create and embody such a place, one that will leave truculent Western integrity intact yet still locate for the wanderer a place of repose, the journey in the literature of the West is not (except with the Mormons) undertaken in order to nourish such an ambitious matrix. In spirit, Western American literature affirms a measure of civilization as an end in itself, but refuses to attach to that commitment a larger *telos*, one that would require an attempt to "conquer" or subdue the setting within which such enclaves of civilization are contained.

From Ticonderoga (Kenneth Roberts), Cooperstown (James Fenimore Cooper), Watauga Old Fields (Caroline Gordon), and the Natchez Trace (Madison Jones, Robert Penn Warren), the setting of the literature of the frontier has drifted beyond settled boundaries to the Ohio of Conrad Richter, to St. Joseph and the anchor of Parkman's *Oregon Trail*, and to the open spaces of North Dakota described in Theodore Roosevelt's *Ranch Life* and remembered in the writing of *The Winning of the West*. Through all of this unfolding, the setting shifted but the subject did not change. And when finally connected to the deserts, plains, and mountains of what is now the West, when a little "domesticated" by settlement of the last empty spaces, by the coming of a "bride" to Yellow Sky (as in Crane's classic story), Western literature did not give up the identity it had achieved as a chronicle of men and women finding their way outside what Leo Marx has called "the cultivated garden."

Internalizing the sense of sacred space, of search and encounter in and with wilderness (wild places and wild men), preserving in memory a heritage of westering that resolves finally into many different genres, affirming the value of individual choice and of a certain peace with providential things not to be remade, the makers of this literature have found a path of their own. They tell of local inhabitation without any loss of the capacity for self-rejuvenation just beyond the limits; of a civil life on a dramatic scale, a life that is conducted with a zest no longer possible in the crowded places where such memories no longer function in individual experience.

This is, of course, a broad synthetic statement about a considerable volume of American writing, one that can be disputed. But it is generally supported by the fiction of the major Western novelists, by some poetry, prose pastoral, Plutarchian biography, old-fashioned "narrative history," and a special sort of travel literature. I make my case here out of the handiwork of the novelists because their achievement is at the center of any Western canon we might devise: because they have been so numerous, so closely related and successful. Furthermore, I focus on the fiction of the West as it stands and not on the literature of the moving frontier.

A good place to begin is with A.B. Guthrie of Montana and his novels of early exploration and settlement. Guthrie has written a series of six novels that, when taken together (as he expects them to be), constitute a history of his state from the coming of the white man to the foothills of the Tetons through the late 1950's. The most famous of these books treat of the earliest inhabitation of (by mountain men/trappers) and travel into his home country by assorted hunters and settlers—of lonely wanderings in search of beaver and of wagon trains going on through the mountains to the Pacific coast. In the first three novels in this series the tone is lofty, hieratic, and spacious, as befits the chronicles of a heroic age. *The Big Sky* (1947), *The Way West* (1949), and *Fair Land, Fair Land* (1982) make up the Dick Summers trilogy and tell the story of those great "loners" who come to know the wilderness as one would learn a holy book. Their names and stories keep alive in memory the sense of the numinous that had, in the first place, inspired them to search "high and deep" into the hidden places "up the Missouri." Summers is less the mad prophet than some of the mountain men, less committed to that absolute, uncircumstanced freedom that is possible only in what political philosophers speak of as "a state of nature." However, though he likes a little "society," like Vardis Fisher's Sam Minard in *Mountain Man* (1965), Frederick Manfred's Hugh Glass in *Lord Grizzly* (1954), and J. Frank Dobie's Ben Lilly in *The Ben Lilly Legend* (1950), he is difficult to imagine in town.

Summers at times has property—more than a gun, traps, a horse, and a buffalo knife. For a while he farms in Missouri. Later he offers his energy and skill to lead a company along the

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Oregon Trail. But finally he cannot live at ease among the "civilizers," seeking instead for a refuge among the Shoshone and neighboring tribes. There he remarries, gets a son, and is killed by soldiers—amidst what remains of "clear air and bright waters," the unchanged handiwork of God. Summers' antitype is the self-made primitive Boone Caudill who is, despite the more admirable side-effects of his absolute liberty, all restlessness and violence. Summers embodies a principle not so extreme—nothing more than a reaction to the beauty of the untouched West and to the destructive, herdlike ways of his own people. Even so, the books in the Dick Summers trilogy project an uneasy attitude toward corporate life, except of the most uncomplicated variety. That uneasiness is only partially modified in Guthrie's three novels of Montana settlement.

These Thousand Hills (1956), *Arfive* (1971), and *The Last Valley* (1975) are concerned with the history of the "cattle kingdom" in that part of the Big Sky Country on the high plains, just below the front range of the Rockies. Even more than that of the cowboy, fictional images of ranchers and stockmen are at the heart of what we can say about the literature of the American West. Their relation to a given natural order is easy and respectful, balanced and tentative. Yet though they rest lightly upon the land (unless their herds are too large), glory in their own self-sufficiency, and accept the costs of a gamble with contingency, these cattlemen create a kind of society. As a culture, they live out of what is "given" without attempting to control more than a little of it. And they have no patience with the remote and arbitrary powers of the state: powers that would interfere with their "private business"—their individual transactions with nature. The test and exhilarating discipline of hard pastoral are part of their self-definition; but they also "lie in possession" of significant holdings and are stewards of a garden (or meadow) with boundaries. Moreover, they make a tradition out of the virtues they attempt to practice—one that resists the modern manipulative and Promethean spirit much more effectively than do the champions of splendid isolation. *These Thousand Hills* treats the beginnings of the most familiar West, "the day of the cattlemen" as described in Ernest S. Osgood's old book of that title, the transition from open range to fencing, with the pushing back to "beyond the wire" and "over the ridge" of the wild creatures and people who lack an adequate sense of "what is thine and mine." Lot Evans moves from feckless youth as a cowboy to being a paragon and political protector of the order he helps to create. But he accomplishes this by acknowledging what he has been. There is no better image of this part of American history—except in J. Evetts Haley's magisterial biography, *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman* (1936).

Arfive and *The Last Valley* are closely related novels of Montana in modern times—a place where progress and its characteristic strategies have been overdone. Fresh memories of the "old order of things" and the close proximity of still surviving wilderness put these mistakes quickly in perspective. In this most recent Montana, nature takes revenge on those who abuse her. Man's estate in the context of Creation is, Guthrie reaffirms, that of a tenant by sufferance, or steward for a nonresident proprietor, not a master. The instruments of this reaffirmation are Tom Ewing, a rancher who keeps "development" at an ironic distance; Benton "Prof" Collingsworth, the local high-school principal; and their younger friend, Ben Tate, who publishes the local newspaper. Together they deny the premise that "progress leaves no retreat."

Which is what can most readily be said about the protagonist in many other Western novels that treat of the place of the cattlemen in a world impatient with the disciplines, pieties, and restrictions of his way of life: Conrad Richter's *Sea of Grass* (1937), Harvey Fergusson's *Grant of Kingdom* (1950), Larry McMurtry's *Horseman, Pass By* (1961) and *Leaving Cheyenne* (1963), Ben Capps' *Sam Chance* (1965), and Elmer Kelton's *The Time It Never Rained* (1973). The thrust of this literature is elegiac. Often it laments what is passing, as do its counterparts in the fiction of the Western solitary: of Natty Bumpo as cowboy, lawman, gunslinger, prospector/scout, or their equivalent. The great positive instance of this subspecies is the hero

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of Jack Schaefer's *Shane* (1949). But there are also many negative versions of the same model, overreachers or supermen like Guthrie's explosive Boone Caudill. Nature's revenge against presumptions committed in violation of her authority has, in Western American literature, its most powerful rendering in Walter Van Tilberg Clark's evocative *The Track of the Cat* (1949).

In this book the three Bridges brothers, with their elderly parents, have a ranch in the Washoe Valley of Nevada where, with the coming of winter, they and their cattle are terrorized by a mysterious mountain lion which attacks both man and beast for the mere joy of killing. The brothers are in no way alike. Arthur, the eldest, dreams pastoral dreams of natural benevolence. Curt, who holds Arthur in contempt, acts out of an unmitigated will to power and plans to use the ranch as a way to get money to go to San Francisco. He has no piety for the given order of Creation. Neither does he admit to any fear of the invisible and ubiquitous "black painter" conjured up by the old Indian, Joe Sam, a fixture on the ranch. In his own skill, nerve, and intellect Curt finds security. The lion kills the passive Arthur, and a dream of the lion, the fear of the power it represents, destroys the self-isolated Curt. In hunting it alone he had refused to recognize that, as Arthur once told him, "nature . . . comes back on you in time." With the help of Joe Sam, Harold, the youngest and most sensible of the clan, kills the offending lion and buries his brothers. The novel ends with promise of a future as Harold prepares to marry and acknowledges it was not the real "black painter" that he shot, that "we'll never get that one." Harold knows that the *genius loci*, the resident spirit of his valley, cannot be subdued. He will not drift off in poetic reverie like Arthur or imagine like Curt that he can deal with the mystery of Being on his own, absolutely, whenever he wishes.

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An examination of radical independence that is altogether different from what appears in *The Track of the Cat* is rendered in Edward Abbey's *The Brave Cowboy* (1956). The book is rightfully subtitled *An Old Tale in a New Time*. In it there is no tolerance for the spirit of domination that is reshaping the West, which (in the language of Clark's Arthur Bridges) lives only for "burning and butchering and cutting down and plowing under." Jack Burns, Abbey's hero, is an anachronism: a loyal, stubborn, cheerful throwback to a time when character and personal rectitude were everything and the nearest federal marshal was found a hundred miles away. Jack Burns gets into trouble trying to free a draft-resisting friend from jail. Failing in that effort, he escapes on his own, to be pursued by a posse through a wilderness where he is as much at home as he is out of place in the haunts of men. Jack has no objection to private property or ranchers, to moderate forms of social and economic order, or indeed any real quarrel with ordinary law enforcement. But he refuses to be merely a number on one of a thousand official lists. He is not judged by nature or troubled by visions of a totem "which is as good . . . as any to mean the end of things." Instead he is crushed by modernity, hit by a truck on a rain-slick highway because his mare has been frightened by the glare of the headlights and the roar of many engines. The high sheriff of Bernal County, New Mexico, couldn't catch and bend Jack Burns. Larger and more impersonal agencies bring him down, though not until Edward Abbey has given us an uncomfortable reminder of how much like other American places Jack's New Mexico has become. But not entirely, not so long as any of his kind survive to remind us of "the lost America our forefathers knew."

I might usefully extend this discussion of characteristic Western writing, especially if I examined closely the lyric celebration of the natural order of things (or complaint at its violation) that is embodied in the conservationist or naturalist writings of so many gifted Western authors. There is Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* (1968), Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow* (1962), Joseph Wood Krutch's *The Voice of the Desert* (1954), J. Frank Dobie's *The Longhorns* (1941) and *The Mustangs* (1952), Roy Bedichek's *Adventures with a Texas Naturalist* (1947), and John Graves' *Goodbye to a River* (1960) and *From a Limestone Ledge* (1980). I am also tempted to add commentary on Mari Sandoz's *Old Jules* (1935) or John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* (1932); or to make a place for remarks on the significant fiction about the American Indian written by his white countrymen. But to do so would only blur the focus, not change the argument concerning Western American literature that I have offered.

Given the evidence gathered monumentally in *A Literary History of the American West* (a volume of 1,353 pages published last year by the Texas Christian University Press), that this literature already exists and has become, on its own terms, a national treasure, what then is likely to be added to this homogenous and self-contained literary canon? To begin, future contributions will not be, I believe, much more urban in spirit than the works that presently have a place within it. Therefore I suspect that they will not issue from or be concerned with California or the coastal West, which is, though closely related, another country. Moreover, except for its unwillingness to treat the modern city as more than a necessary evil, this is not a tradition of artistic alienation. Instead, as I said earlier, it is a literature of memory, one that will continue to react to wilderness and wild creatures nearby—will thus continue, or dissolve and disappear into postures understood and appreciated by the authors of the *Columbia Literary History*. But though nature in its most dramatic mode is informative of Western literature, though the Western writer when he contemplates the landscape does not dream of "cultivated gardens," he will not under the pressure of modern industrial civilization revert to confusing the "New Eden" of his most hopeful vision with the merely primitive. For his individualism contains in its memory of westering a critique of its own potential excesses. Looking down from his post of observation, from the top of the ridge where the "high country" begins, the great

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peaks towering above and the plains spread out below him, with his enemies visible as small figures marching in search of their quarry, the Western artist is like Abbey's Jack Burns. But in practicing his craft upon his subject, he will, I suspect, prefer to make a stand instead of retiring into the "timber," or some other country of the mind. If we wait and watch his performance, we should enjoy the "ruckus" that is bound to occur.

M.E. Bradford is professor of English at the University of Dallas, and his most recent book is Remembering Who We Are: Observations of a Southern Conservative. *He is the son and grandson of Southwestern cattlemen.*

SPORTS

Amateurs and the Olympics

by Ed Markey

In 1889, when the Baron Pierre de Coubertin was in the middle of formulating his plan to revive the Olympic Games of ancient Greece, one of his primary worries was the use of cash as an incentive for performance. He feared that "a mercantile spirit threatened to invade sporting circles," and that amateur sports had to be "purified and united." In the first modern Olympics held in 1896, first and second place finishers were awarded silver and bronze medals; gold was thought to connote greed. The third place finisher settled for a hearty handshake.

After 92 years, the prize structure has escalated to three Olympic medals, including gold, and "unofficial" awards, mostly green. In addition to competing for a medal in Seoul, athletes from Korea, the Soviet Union, and France, among others, were striving for government-granted financial rewards. An Olympic judo champion from Korea now has a gold medal around his neck, and 900,000 won (about $1,250) per month in his pocket. For Soviet athletes, the value of a gold was 12,000 rubles, or roughly $19,200. After his 1984 Olympic victory in the 5,000 meters, Morocco's Said Aouita moved into a new house, donated by the king of Morocco.

These are examples of just one form of professionalism in the Olympics. For many years, Eastern bloc athletes have been among those who are given "jobs" that enable them to concentrate on their athletic training. This year, professional tennis players were allowed to compete for Olympic medals, and it appears that NBA basketball players will be allowed to wear Olympic colors in 1992.

As things stand now, the definition of amateur or professional cannot be applied equally in all sports. Take four examples: Danny Manning, Edwin Moses, Sergei Bubka, and Heike Dreschler. These four all make money through sports, they are all, in some sense, "professionals," yet they cannot be treated equally. Just out of college last summer, Manning played on the Olympic basketball team as an amateur. He then signed a $10 million contract with the LA Clippers to play pro ball. Edwin Moses is self-employed in that his money is made on a per-appearance basis. When, years ago, Moses was asked how he could make a living on track as an amateur, he responded succinctly that he was "an enlightened amateur." The Athletics Congress, the governing body of track and field in the US, has a trust fund system, in which an athlete's earnings are placed into an account in his or her name, and withdrawals are made for "training" expenses. It is a *de facto* savings account. Bubka (from the USSR) is reimbursed by his government for each world record he sets and gold medal he wins in the pole vault. And Dreschler is essentially an investment of the East German government, which has paid for her education and funded her training.

New rules must be introduced to conform to the new status of Olympic

Courtesy NBC

Edwin Moses at the World Championships in Rome, September 1987.

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athletes. Coming up with such regulations is going to be dicey, because there is not a worldwide definition of "professional." It may be impossible to find a common ground. Financially-assisted foreign athletes may still be thought of as amateurs in their own countries, especially when compared to American-style pro basketball players. Even if the IOC makes a ruling on what constitutes a professional, ways to circumvent its limits will be surely found, just as there are now ways around adhering to the strict concept of amateurism.

International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch has been at the forefront of the attempt to get each nation to send its best athletes, regardless of how they make their income—in other words, to get rid of this already-eroding concept of "amateur" athletes.

Representation of each country by its best is a noble idea. But as far as the United States is concerned, that is only the first step. Professionalism in the Olympics is as much a fiscal question as an ideological one, and the United States is at the crossroads. It can follow the path much of the rest of the world has chosen, paying athletes outright, covering training expenses or offering performance incentives. Or it can hold fast to the idea of sending only "amateur" athletes. In that case we can't complain about the medal count, because our "nonleague" athletes will not be able to compete with the privileged rest of the world.

If this country wants to do something about fostering athletics, there are going to have to be some changes made.

Winning an Olympic medal is the highest athletic aspiration for most of the sporting world. That is one of the essential reasons foreign athletes receive financial assistance. Emphasis in the US is on basketball, baseball, football, hockey, and tennis, because those are the sports where money can be made. That is where the competition and training and opportunities are, and those sports do not need any help. But if the US is to compete on equal footing in the less glamourous (i.e., most Olympic) sports, there has to be "opportunity." There has to be professionalism.

James Michener has said that "the costs of becoming a top athlete in most fields have become so great that amateurs cannot pay for them out of their own pockets." But unlike the Soviet Union or Eastern bloc nations, the United States government would have a hard time justifying tax money going to talented, healthy athletes while there are bigger problems at home. Similarly, the general public is not going to fund—through attendance at events, purchase of associated merchandise, etc.—a sport that does not play well on television, has no recognizable personalities to promote, is not popular with a sizable number of Americans, or cannot be wagered upon.

What's left is corporate sponsorship. Some already exists. The Miller Brewing Company sponsors the US Olympic training center in Colorado Springs. Miller has obviously made a significant financial commitment to present and future Olympic athletes. Rather than providing this broad assistance, perhaps companies such as Miller should become sponsors of individual American teams, in association with each sport's governing body or federation.

Yugo now "sponsors" the US men's volleyball team to an unknown degree. Perhaps an agreement should be made with the federations by which athletes are selected by the governing body, given jobs by the team's sponsor, and have training, living, and miscellaneous expenses paid for by the companies. The federation would have "sport" control while the companies would have financial control. The athletes could also become spokesmen for the companies, appear at various events, wear their companies' logos on their uniforms, etc.

Corporate sponsorship is now a given with major sporting events. In case you haven't checked, some of New Year's Day's biggest bowl games are the Sunkist Fiesta Bowl, the USF&G Sugar Bowl, the Mazda Gator Bowl, and the John Hancock Sun Bowl. That's the same sort of setup from which most of American sport could benefit. It would not take as much money to support the US handball team as it does for, say, Gulf & Western to run the New York Knicks. Wouldn't a company such as McDonald's stand a lot to gain by being the sole and complete financial backer of the US Olympic gymnastics team? And wouldn't US gymnastics as a whole benefit from an infusion of support?

Of course, if Americans are worried about their sports and teams being overrun by corporations, or being tainted by the color of money and becoming too much like the Europeans, that's fine, too. Just don't complain about the lack of American medals.

Ed Markey is currently a publicist for NBC sports. He worked on NBC's coverage of the Seoul Olympics and ABC's coverage of the Los Angeles Olympics.

LETTERS

On Poetry

by Richard Eberhart

People want to save their souls by writing poetry, or so they say. Should we take that seriously? Did Smart save his soul in the madhouse writing all those lucid lines? Perhaps it's enough to say that from primitive times there has been a need for expression.

Poetry is older than prose. Poetry was the morning cry when coming out of the cave to see that the sun had arisen again, a high song of joy in the treble clef. It was also the low sounds of grief at the death of a child who had wandered away from the cave and been killed by an animal. Our early ancestors probably knew the whole range of emotions from joy to sorrow, from lyric cry to threnody.

Nowadays prose must outnumber poetry quantitatively nine to one. Millions of Americans get along from birth to death without poetry—well, maybe they read a poem in a newspaper, but they then forget it. Yet however mechanical our age becomes we have to deal with prose all the time. We have to read, if only traffic signs; we have to be instructed; we have to give instructions. The prose of the day may be some kind of computer language, part mathematics, part English, as a Harvard Phi Beta Kappa orator warned at a commencement not long ago; and it may be a dangerous sign of possibly losing the

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collective mind, as she put it. But at least prose is for everybody. Poetry is not.

New poems are sometimes new half a century later, as is the case with my own "The Groundhog," or "The Fury of Aerial Bombardment." Both are old but have lasted. Take a look at Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse*. Flip back to the last half-inch of pages, where you'll find a vast collection of poems by somebody called Anonymous. Mr. Anonymous, about two thousand years old, or at least a thousand, wrote some of the newest poems in that book.

On Saturday, March 26, 1988, at Thomas Center, Gainesville, a plaque was unveiled commemorating Robert Frost, who had lived here part time, in the winter, for 15 years or more starting in the early 30's. He had given readings at the university, and his wife died here. In his citation President Reitz said in part, "He has shown us that it is possible to be both subtle and plain, both original and traditional, both direct and richly textured, both engaging and serious."

In my *Collected Poems: 1930-1986* there is one entitled "Worldly Failure," which reads as follows:

I looked into the eyes of
  Robert Frost
Once, and they were
  unnaturally deep.
Set far back in the skull, as far
  back in the earth.
An oblique glance made them
  look even deeper.

He stood inside the door on
  Brewster Street,
Looking out. I proffered him
  an invitation.
We went on talking for an hour
  and a half.
To accept or not to accept
  was his question.

Whether he wanted to meet
  another poet;
He erred in sensing some
  intangible slight.
Hard for him to make a
  democratic leap.
To be a natural poet you have
  to be unnaturally deep.
While he was talking he was
  looking out,
But stayed in, sagacity
  better indoors.
He became a metaphor for
  inner devastation,
Too scared to accept
  my invitation.

There is a story behind the poem. At the time Frost was living on Brewster Street near Lake View Avenue in Cambridge, where my mother-in-law lives. My wife, Betty, and I were living at 10 Hilliard Place. On Betty's suggestion I went over to see Frost and invited him to dinner on Saturday night to meet a British poet friend of ours. He said he would be glad to come. We talked outside his door for a long time. Betty had told me to show him a review, I think now it was a British one, of a current book of mine, which was positive but not all praise, to see what he thought of it. Upon perusing this Frost said he never read reviews of his own work, and paid no attention to them.

On Thursday Frost phoned to say he could not come on Saturday as he had been called out of town, or some such excuse.

Later we found out that the lady who took care of Frost, Kay Morrison, had informed him that the poet in question coming for dinner Saturday night was Kathleen Raine, one of the best English poets, a contemporary of mine from 1927 to 1929 at Cambridge. Frost remembered at once that Raine had written a review of his poetry in the London *Times Literary Supplement* that was not 100 percent praise. It was positive, but maybe only 90 percent. So Frost refused to dine with her at our house. He could not stand any critic saying anything against his poetry, even if only slightly dispraising.

Here is a stanza from "Vignettes" in my book *The Long Reach* (1984):

The day after the inauguration
  of President Kennedy
We went to a cocktail party at
  the Coxes,
Neighbors in Georgetown near
  34th Street.
The Hindemiths were there,
  I had not known composers,
The talk was all of the
  new America.
Robert Frost was there. I went
  up to him eagerly, saying,
"I hear you talked with the
  President this morning,
What did he say?" Instant reply,
  "I did all the talking."

This is a direct, true statement, no subterfuges, no ambiguity. Is this better than the complexities, artifice, and aesthetic distance in the other poem? Is the reality of poetry aided or lessened by comparison with actual facts behind a poem? If you love the poetry should you care about the biography?

Richard Eberhart is the author most recently of Collected Poems, *reviewed in the January* Chronicles. *He lives in Maine.*

STAGE

Break a Leg

by Katherine Dalton

In 1963, when Tyrone Guthrie produced his first season at the new Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, the States did not have much in the way of regional theater. In a country whose two most famous actors are, respectively, a President and a presidential assassin, Ronald Reagan and John Wilkes Booth—two actors who, in other words, became famous for something other than their art—it seems inevitable that a British director would found what is one of our premier theaters. (At least we are not alone. Guthrie founded Canada's *de facto* national theater, the Stratford Festival Theater in London, Ontario, as well.)

It was 25 years ago last May that the new Guthrie opened with *Hamlet*, and its 25th season these past nine months included a production of *Hamlet* as well, directed by Artistic Director Garland Wright. *Hamlet* is such a difficult play not only because of the language, and the length, but because its main character, the man who must carry the show, is not always attractive. Wright purposefully chose to play Hamlet very young, choosing the American actor Zjelko Ivanek for the lead. Ivanek is in his early 30's but is slight enough to pass for a teenager. It is a sound

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Joe Giametti

Zeljko Ivanek as the Prince of Denmark at the Guthrie Theater.

concept, but Ivanek was not up to bringing it off. There needs to be something appealing about Hamlet, an air that offsets his sometimes petty rage, or a handsomeness at least, to help make up for the petulance that is so often his outlet for grief. This version of the play had some strengths—notably the play within the play, which was well done as a sort of Noh drama—but a bandy-legged Hamlet, a very weak Gertrude, and an overly naive Ophelia (a common mistake) undermined some better characterizations, most notably Laertes (played by Curzon Dobell, whose work with Stratford director Robin Phillips shows).

But a director deserves acknowledgment for what he tries to do as well as for what he achieves. Wright saw Hamlet as very young and to a great extent overwhelmed by events; in fact the most interesting thing Wright had to say about his reading of the play touched on just this point. He had thought, going into it, that the main trouble he was going to have with *Hamlet* was that "it's a deeply introspective play and we're not living in a society that's introspective. So I wasn't sure it would speak loudly enough. But oddly enough, as we worked I found *Hamlet* is not as introspective as I'd assumed. Reading it on the page you think it's a play about thinking in the face of acting or doing, and substituting that for doing. As a matter of fact, *Hamlet* is not about postponing action so much as there is so much else on Hamlet's mind. There's a lot going on for a young person, living with a crisis day to day."

Lucian Pintilie's version of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* was stronger as a performance, primarily because of Rebecca Ellens as Hedvig and Richard Ooms as Old Ekdal, both of whom were wonderful (Wright singled out Ooms' performance as one of the season's breakthroughs, but most of the cast was quite good, including Christopher McCann as Gregers Werle, Keith Jochim as Relling, and Charles Seibert—from television's *Trapper John, M.D.*—as Hjalmar Ekdal). Pintilie brought out all the humor in the play, which is extremely funny in parts, especially in the final scene, leading up to Hedvig's self-sacrificial suicide. (Since Pintilie had previously directed this play, and Miss Ellens, at the Arena Stage in Washington, DC, the Guthrie cannot quite claim this as its own production.)

But some of the best news out of the Guthrie is its plans for development. Wright is trying to knead more money into the company, hiring voice coach Elizabeth Smith (the Guthrie is larger than most Broadway houses and unmiked) and raising the artists' salaries. In 1987 he instituted the Guthrie Lab, essentially a workshop for the actors and directors. The fundraising goal for the next few years is $25 million, and that's for an endowment fund; Wright admits it's a lot, "revolutionary," as he puts it, "in a field that's never thought of itself as on an equal scale with museums and orchestras." He's making quite a good point: no one would be surprised by such a number at, say, the Metropolitan Opera in New York. "Actors," Wright says, "have historically been gypsies, and most cultures have not only allowed that but encouraged that. Ultimately it has an effect on how good we find ourselves being." That the Guthrie's executive director, Edward A. Martenson, formerly ran the theater program at NEA can only help, though one of the things the Guthrie should be proudest of is the amount of local support: 80 percent of the summer audience and 90 percent of the winter are local people from the twin cities, and over 90 percent of those who give money to support the Guthrie are likewise local.

The season closes this month with Howard Brenton and David Hare's drama *à clef Pravda*, a British play based on the life of Rupert Murdoch, rounding out a season that included *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, a new adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (none of which, unfortunately, I saw). Next year's season starts in June. As of our press date half the fundraising goal has been met in pledges, a good sign; perhaps an even better sign is what Wright said when asked if he missed New York. He lived and worked very happily there, he says, on and off-Broadway, for 17 years. But he does not miss it: "Not for one second." Our best hope for any strong regional theater is in just that kind of rancorless prejudice.

Katherine Dalton is managing editor of Chronicles.

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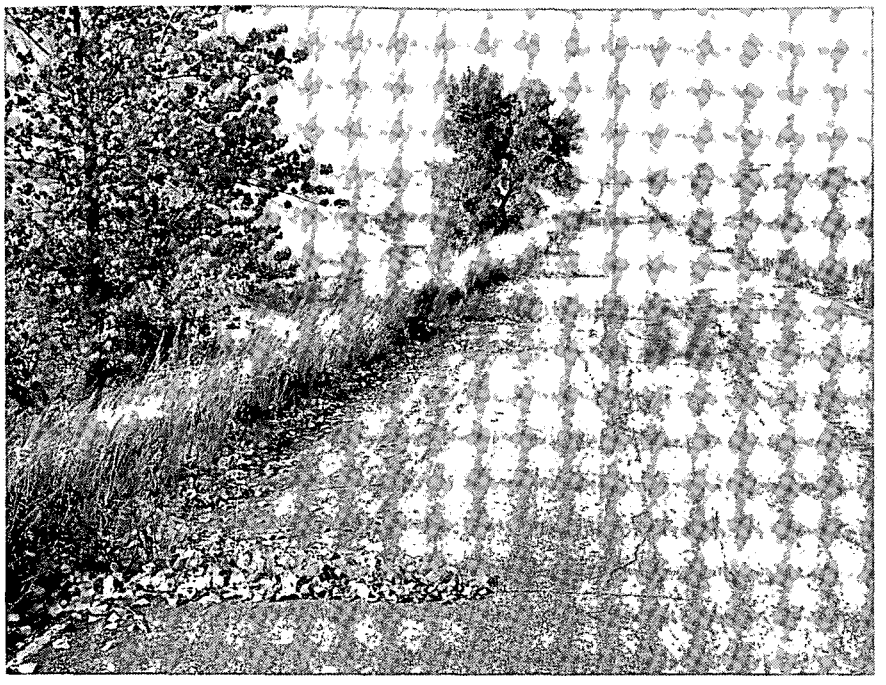

ART

The West in Photographs

Opening February 19 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art is an exhibition of photographs of the West by Robert Adams. Born in New Jersey, Adams now lives outside of Denver and has spent most of his life out West. The 225 photographs in the exhibition were taken between 1965 and 1986; shown here is a photograph of Nebraska State Highway 2 (left) and another of the Missouri River in Clay County, South Dakota (below). The show runs through April 23 and then travels to Washington and Fort Worth.

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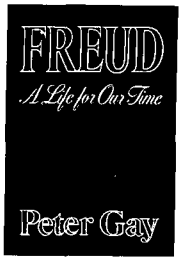

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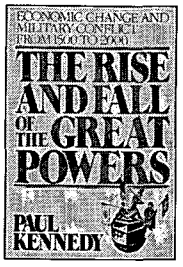

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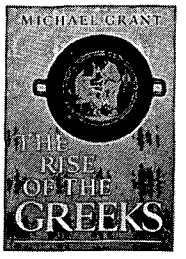

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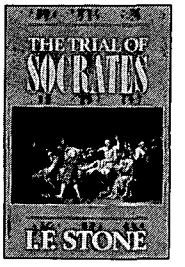

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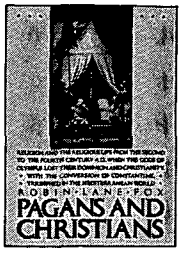

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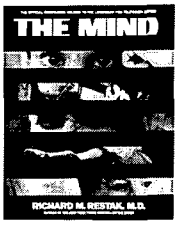

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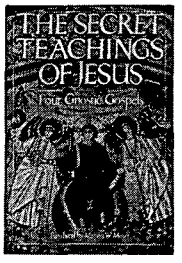

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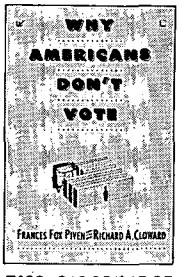

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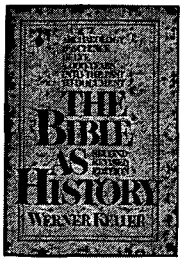

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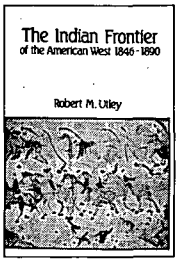

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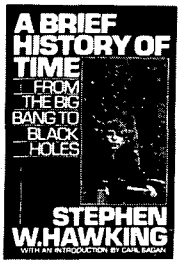

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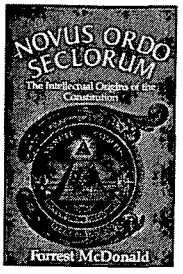

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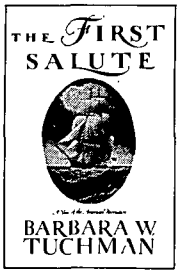

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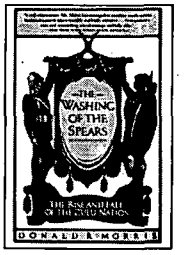
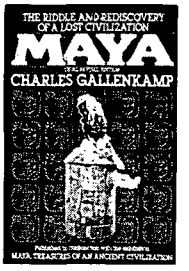
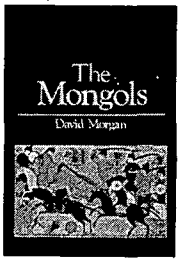


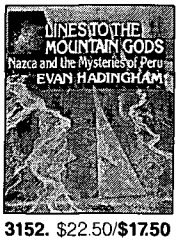
2436. $21.95/**$15.50**



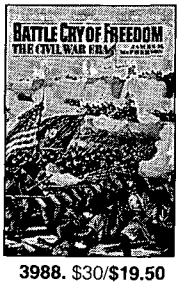
2535. $22.95/**$16.95**



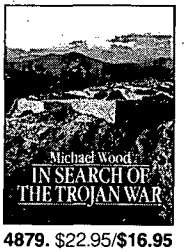
2642. $19.95/**$15.95**



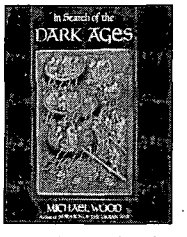
3152. $22.50/**$17.50**



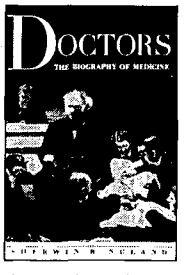
3988. $30/**$19.50**



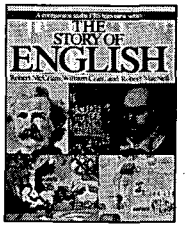
4879. $22.95/**$16.95**



6981. $22.95/**$16.95**



2170. $24.95/**$17.50**



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